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Resisting Boys and Complying Girls?

Young Children's Narratives of the Child's Opportunities for Agency in Child–Parent Conflicts

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FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND
PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

In Nordic countries, child–parent relations have become more democratic and negotiable than in the past. Despite greater democratization, the power dynamics remain asymmetrical and manifest in everyday conflicts caused by opposing views and goals of the child and parent. Previous research has overlooked young children's voices in child–parent conflicts, especially from a gendered perspective. Thus, this study increases our understanding of intergenerational conflicts from young children's viewpoints. More specifically, it examines how young (3–6-year-old) Finnish children narrate and make sense of a child's opportunities for agency in fictional child–parent conflicts and how boys' and girls' descriptions differ. In terms of theory, the present study applies the concepts of generational order and generagency to examine the relationships among generation, gender, and children's agency. Agency is understood as relational, meaning that in families, children's agency is both enabled and constrained by intergenerational relations. The data was generated with the Story Magician's Play Time method and consisted of 45 children's (19 boys and 26 girls) narratives. The data was analyzed with narrative methods.

The analysis revealed diversity in how young children make sense of the child's opportunities for agency in child–parent conflicts. Children's stories showed the existing structural position of the child within the generational order but also their opportunities to blur, reconstruct, and even reverse the child–parent power hierarchy. The child's opportunities for agency varied from complying to resisting and negotiating: the child had only minor, if any, opportunities for influence, they was able to hinder the parent's actions and decisions, or they contributed to a joint agreement and hence, the child was able to participate. While the boys narrated child's hostile resistance, such behavior led to acts of solidarity and apology in the girls' stories. Thus, stories also conveyed children's gendered ways of describing child agency in child–parent conflicts. Examining a child's opportunities for agency through participation and influence produces a more multidimensional and nuanced picture of children's agency in child–parent conflicts and illuminates the importance of moving away from simplifying the concept of children's agency.

Keywords: agency, child–parent conflict, gender, generagency, generational order, influence, narrative, participation, power, story, young boy, young girl

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Pohjoismaissa lapsi–vanhempisuhteet ovat kehittyneet aiempaa demokraattisemmiksi ja neuvoteltavammiksi. Siitä huolimatta valtadynamiikka on pysynyt epäsymmetrisenä, mikä näkyy lapsen ja vanhemman eriävien näkemysten aiheuttamissa arjen konflikteissa. Lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden konflikteja tarkastelevissa tutkimuksissa on harvoin kuunneltu pienten lasten näkemyksiä, varsinkaan sukupuolinäkökulmasta. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on lisätä ymmärrystä sukupolvien välisistä konflikteista pienten lasten näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan, kuinka Suomessa asuvat 3–6-vuotiaat lapset kuvaavat lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksia kuvitteellisissa lapsi-vanhempisuhteiden konflikteissa ja miten poikien ja tyttöjen kuvaukset eroavat. Teoreettisesti tutkimus hyödyntää sukupolvijärjestys- ja generagency-käsitteitä kuvaamaan sukupolven, sukupuolen ja lasten toimijuuden välisiä suhteita. Toimijuutta lähestytään relationaalisena ilmiönä, mikä tarkoittaa, että sukupolvien väliset suhteet sekä mahdollistavat että rajoittavat lasten toimijuutta. Aineisto luotiin Tarinataikurituokiot-menetelmällä, ja se koostuu 45 lapsen (19 poikaa ja 26 tyttöä) kertomuksista. Aineisto analysoitiin narratiivisin menetelmin.

Kerronnasta tunnistettiin pienten lasten moninaiset tavat jäsentää lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksia lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden konflikteissa. Tarinoissa tuli ilmi sekä lapsen rakenteellinen asema sukupolvijärjestyksessä että hänen mahdollisuutensa hämärtää, rakentaa uudelleen ja jopa kääntää ympäri perinteinen lapsi–vanhempivaltahierarkia. Lapsen toimijuus vaihteli myöntymisestä vastustukseen ja neuvottelemiseen: lapsella oli vain vähän, jos ollenkaan vaikutusmahdollisuuksia, hän pystyi vaikeuttamaan tai estämään vanhemman toimia ja päätöksiä tai hän edisti sopimista, jolloin myös lapsen osallisuus toteutui. Sekä pojat että tytöt kertoivat lapsen vastustavan vanhempaansa vihamielisesti, mutta vain tyttöjen tarinoissa se johti lapsen solidaarisuuteen ja anteeksipyyntöön. Tarinat välittivät näin myös sukupuolisidonnaisia tapoja kuvata lapsen toimijuutta. Lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksien tarkasteleminen osallisuuden ja vaikuttamisen kautta tuottaa monipuolisemman kuvan lapsen toimijuudesta ja osoittaa, kuinka tärkeää on ymmärtää toimijuuden moniulotteisuus.

Avainsanat: generagency, kertomus, lapsi–vanhempikonflikti, osallisuus, pieni poika, pieni tyttö, sukupolvijärjestys, sukupuoli, tarina, toimijuus, vaikutus, valta

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Jyväskylä, 11, November
Maria Lahtinen

LIST OF ORIGINAL PAPERS

Sub-study I   Lahtinen, M., Böök, M. L., & Sevón, E. (2023a). From be-
ing ignored to engaging in dialogue: Young boys' nar-
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Sub-study II   Lahtinen, M., Sevón, E., & Böök, M. L. (2023b). From sur-
render stories to persistence stories: Young girls' narra-
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Sub-study III   Lahtinen, M., Sevón, E., & Böök, M. L. (*Being revised*).
Rebellious boys and caring girls? Young children's nar-
ratives of child agency and opportunities for influence
in child–parent conflicts.

The first author, Maria Lahtinen, is the corresponding author of each research
article (sub-studies I–III) included in this dissertation. She has contributed con-
siderably to the study design, including the empirical and theoretical ap-
proaches, data collection, analysis, interpretation of the results, and writing pro-
cess. The supervisors of this dissertation study oversaw all stages of the research
process and commented on all three manuscripts and the summary.

FIGURES

TABLE

CONTENTS

ORIGINAL PAPERS

1 INTRODUCTION

In Western societies, relations between children and parents have undergone major changes over the past few decades (Chen et al., 2019; Greene & Nixon, 2020; Kuczynski, 2003). Parenting has become increasingly child–centered and traditional child–parent power relations based on authoritarianism have evolved to be more democratic and negotiable (Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016). Such development has been accelerated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989, Articles 12 and 13), according to which children have a right to express their views freely and have them considered. In today's families, children are often afforded more leeway to express their agency than before and parents are no longer assumed to have absolute power to make all the decisions for their children (Bjerke, 2011; Bosisi & Olagreno, 2019; Horgan et al., 2020; Kuczynski et al., 2018). Such development in child–parent relations has also occurred in Nordic countries, including Finland, the socio-cultural context of this study (Laurén & Malinen, 2021; Mikkonen et al., 2023; Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2017; Sequeira, 2023). From a global perspective, Nordic countries are regarded as being at the forefront in promoting children's rights and well-being, with an emphasis on gender equality as an important social value both in families and society (Gurdal & Sorbring, 2024; Kjellander & Sjöblom, 2023).

Since early childhood education and care (ECEC) aged children's opportunities for agency depend greatly on the prevailing hierarchies within interpersonal relations (Leonard, 2016; Sorbring & Kuczynski, 2018), children's agency should be approached as relational (Alanen, 2018; Leonard, 2016). Thus, when examining young children's agency in child–parent relations, the concept of generational order is important to consider (Alanen, 2009; Esser et al., 2016; Leonard, 2016; Punch, 2016). Despite the greater democratization within contemporary generations, asymmetrical power dynamics still prevail in several ways (Alanen, 2009; Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016). This power inequality manifests especially in child–parent conflicts, that is, in situations when the child and parent have opposing views and goals (Della Porta et al., 2022; Kuczynski, 2003; Persram et al., 2019). According to Kuczynski and colleagues (2018), child–

parent relations are filled with inherent contradictions that often arise as children resist unwanted parental demands. Parents should balance granting children leeway for agency while protecting them from harm (Greene & Nixon, 2020). However, previous studies on child–parent conflicts conducted in Western societies suggest that parents tend to demand compliance from children and exert quite powerful control both over the child's behavior and the outcome of a situation (e.g., Della Porta et al., 2019; Martin, 2016; Mudrick et al., 2023; Rechhia et al., 2010). Similar results have also been found in the few Nordic studies examining child–parent conflicts from young children's perspectives (Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009). Although children's rights are important at all times and in all circumstances, they seem to be particularly at risk in situations where children's views and perspectives differ from those of their parents. In this regard, Kuczynski and colleagues (2018) stated that children's resistance is easily interpreted by parents as negative and problematic behavior that should be suppressed. However, children's resistance can also be viewed through an agentic lens as their struggle to have a voice, recognition, and influence (Kuczynski et al., 2018; Sevón, 2015; United Nations, 1989, Articles 12 and 13).

Child–parent conflicts are an inevitable but significant part of children's everyday lives. Yet, research on conflicts and child–parent relations in general has traditionally concentrated on parents' perspectives and influence on children (Burke & Kuczynski, 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016, pp. 15–16; Nelson et al., 2019). Such an adult-centric approach positions parents as active and competent agents and children as objects of parental authority. This means that the voices of young children in particular have rarely been heard, possibly because they have been seen as difficult to study, not relevant enough, and not offering any contribution to scientific research (DeCosta et al., 2023; Puroila et al., 2012a; Murray, 2019; Sevón et al., 2023). The phenomenon under investigation is also very apt given recent discussions in Finnish society about the upbringing of children and child–parent relations in general (Sihvonen, 2016, p. 73). Questions have arisen, for example, about whether children are offered too much leeway in terms of their participation and influence, what kind of agency is appropriate, and what constraints on children's agency are necessary. However, despite the increased social discussion, related research is lagging behind. Likewise, the few studies on child–parent conflicts have tended to focus on children as a homogenous group, leaving possible gender differences unexplored (Sevón, 2015). However, it is well recognized that children's lives are not merely generationed but also gendered (Alanen, 2009, 2018; Leonard, 2016; Punch, 2020). Indeed, from an early age, children have been found to be conscious of gender expectations related to masculinity and femininity and to express their agency in a way that perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes (e.g., Baker et al., 2016; Blakemore et al., 2009; Greene & Nixon, 2020). These gaps in current research were the basis for the present study.

The aim of this dissertation is to offer novel insights into how 3–6-year-old Finnish children narrate, make sense of, and understand child–parent conflicts from a generagency perspective. Generagency captures the relationships among

generation, gender, and children's agency. So, this study answers two research questions: How do 3–6-year-old children describe the child's opportunities for agency in different story types of fictional child–parent conflicts, and how do 3–6-year-old boys' and girls' descriptions of the child's opportunities for agency differ in different story types?

This age group was chosen since the voices of young children about child–parent conflicts have been overlooked in previous research (cf. Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009). Thus, there is a knowledge gap in our understanding of the phenomenon from the point of view of young children. In this developmental period, children are capable of engaging, contributing, and co-creating knowledge together with adults, thus providing insights into their life worlds (DeCosta et al., 2023; Engel, 1995; Holmes, 2019). Similarly, 3–6-year-old children can produce verbal stories (Engel, 2005; Fellowes & Oakley, 2019; see also Rollins, 2024), although the cognitive and linguistic skills of the youngest children in this age group may not enable them to produce narratives with a complete story structure without assistance (Ilgaz & Aksu-Koc, 2005; Puroila et al., 2012a). Also, the child's increasing capacity for autonomous and resisting actions toward parental control at such an age may increase the occurrence of conflicts (Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990; Sevón, 2015), from which children may draw on elements for their stories. Children's narratives were generated using Story Magician's Play Time (SMPT), a playful narrative method developed to listen to children's stories about sensitive and socially challenging situations in a non-threatening way (Koivula et al., 2020; Turja & Laakso, 2011).

The research questions are answered with the help of three sub-studies, each with having their own research questions. Sub-study I explores what story types can be identified in boys' narratives of child–parent conflicts and how young boys describe the child's participation in the different story types. Sub-study II examines what story types can be identified in young girls' narratives of child–parent conflicts, how these girls position the child and parent in relation to agency and power in different story types, and what role gender plays in these story types. Sub-study III draws on the previous sub-studies and explores both the boys' and girls' stories. It focuses on identifying different story types, as well as similarities and differences in how boys and girls describe the child's opportunities for agency and influence in these stories.

This dissertation is an independent entity with its own data but part of the wider project VALTAKO (Conflicts and power in close relationships of children and adolescents – Narrated emotions and agency) carried out at the University of Jyväskylä. By addressing and focusing on young children, childhood, and child–parent relations, this dissertation is closely connected to the disciplines of education and early childhood education. More precisely, it is situated at the intersection of childhood studies and narrative inquiry. Childhood studies, also called "the new sociology of childhood", is used as an umbrella term for interdisciplinary research concerning children and childhood (Alanen, 2012; James & James, 2012; Punch, 2020). Narrative inquiry is used to refer to a methodology and a way of understanding experience narratively (Clandinin,

2023; Moran et al., 2021a). In the present study, children are seen as competent agents and rights-holders (James & James, 2004; Mayall, 2002, 2015; United Nations, 1989), who communicate their views, experiences, and understandings through narration (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Engel, 2005; Riessman, 2008). Thus, this study emphasizes the potential of listening to the perspectives of young children in the form of narratives, through which children can make substantial contributions to scientific research. Children's narratives are seen as spaces or "portals" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) to children's lived experiences and their ways of making sense of and constructing meaning about their worlds (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; see also Moran et al., 2021a). Thus, children's narratives offer the researcher one way of entering the worlds and comprehending the experiences and views of young children.

The present dissertation aims to contribute to our understanding of child–parent conflicts in three ways. First, it seeks to widen the empirical corpus of research on intergenerational conflicts from the perspective of young children, who have rarely been heard, and describe the differences in how both boys and girls narrate children's opportunities for agency in conflicts. Because children's sense-making and understanding of the world are unique and different from those of adults (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Dockett et al., 2012; Moran et al., 2021a), children's stories may reveal factors that hamper or support children's opportunities for agency, which otherwise might go unrecognized. Second, this study aims to make a theoretical contribution to our understanding of children's agency within childhood (and family) studies by gathering insights from other disciplines and research, including psychology (Kuczynski, 2003), sociology (Corsaro, 2012; Goffman, 1961), and children's rights studies (Lundy, 2007). As agency is a central concept in all these research areas, it should facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of children's agency in child–parent conflicts. Third, the present study enriches existing knowledge concerning narrative and participatory research methods with young children by applying the innovative SMPT method, which utilizes pictures, storytelling, play, and a hand puppet to access the children's life worlds. Thus, the present study also adds to our much-needed understanding of age- and development-appropriate methods for studying young children (Murray, 2019; Sevón et al., 2023). To the best of my knowledge, the current study is the only one of its kind conducted in the Finnish context.

2 THE CHILD'S OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGENCY IN CHILD–PARENT CONFLICTS

2.1 Asymmetrical child–parent relations and the child's relational agency

How child–parent relations have been understood has changed over the past few decades; with the advent of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989), the traditional understanding of children as passive recipients of parents' influence and authority has been challenged by the conception of children as active and competent agents (Greene & Nixon, 2020; Kuczynski et al., 2018; Sevón, 2015). The conception that only parents possess power, knowledge, and maturity that young children in particular are lacking has changed (Alanen, 2009; Leonard, 2016, p. 69–70); children now have more freedom to express their agency and participate in decision-making (Bjerke, 2011; Horgan et al., 2020; Leonard, 2016; Sevón, 2015). Such development in the power dynamics of the child–parent relations is more common in Western individualistic societies (Chen et al., 2019; Foo, 2019; Kuczynski et al., 2018; Leonard, 2016), which are generally also classified as belonging to "the economically developed world" (see Khan et al., 2022). In countries with collectivistic cultures, child–parent relations are more likely based on more authoritarian parenting, traditional power hierarchy, and children's strict compliance (Burke & Kuczynski, 2018; Foo, 2019; Greene & Nixon, 2020; Kuczynski et al., 2018). Thus, to what degree children's opportunities for agency are allowed or restricted by power hierarchies depends on the inter-personal relations and socio-cultural context (Gurdal & Sorbring, 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 2018). Nevertheless, because the relational dynamics are multidimensional and complex, there can be great diversity between families in how child–parent power relations develop, even within the same socio-cultural context (Breiner et al., 2024; Burke & Kuczynski, 2018; Lansford et al., 2021). Likewise, as Lansford and colleagues (2021) argued,

individualist and collectivist orientations can co-exist both within the same cultural group and the same individuals in different circumstances. Currently, however, discussions have sparked in different contexts about the shifting dynamics of power within child–parent relations and the resulting undermined hierarchies, change in children from dutiful to misbehaving, and problematization of parenthood as a whole (see Sihvonen 2020; Zheng et al., 2022).

The power dynamics of intergenerational relations are more equal today than in previous periods. Despite this, children's opportunities for agency are realized within and across existing hierarchical relations between children and parents (Alanen, 2009, 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016). Alanen (2009, 2020) used the concept of *generational order* as "a conceptual starting point and an analytical tool for framing the study of childhood in ways that will capture both the structured nature of childhood and children's active presence in generational structures" (p. 163). Since adulthood and childhood are relational, the position of a child cannot exist without the position of an adult and vice versa (Alanen & Mayall, 2001; see also Mayall, 2013; Qvortrup, 2009). Thus, the generations as social structures are reproduced between children and adults in their everyday interactions. With this concept, Alanen (2009) emphasized generational interdependence but also the importance of social structure in conveying young children's less powerful positions. Discussions about positioning also bring to the fore discussions about children's agency.

Children's *agency* is the core concept of this study and arises from the understanding of "children as social actors" (James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1990). Historically, children have not always been perceived as "beings" who actively construct childhood but rather as passive "becomings" (Leonard, 2016; Matthews, 2007), in other words, "adult in the making" (Uprichard, 2008). In the 1990s, the concept of children's agency was first employed and is an obvious tenet of the "new" sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1990; Mayall, 2015; Qvortrup et al., 1994). Labeled as "childhood studies," the "new" sociology of childhood arose as a critique of the studies focusing on child development, and adults and adulthood, and emphasized both childhood as socially constructed and the importance of respecting children and childhood in the present (Hammersley, 2017; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). In childhood studies, early conceptualizations of agency were strongly influenced by the Giddensian way of equating agency with action and the ability to bring about change (Giddens, 1984) or as James (2009) put it: "…make things happen" (p. 42). Agency has also been considered to be naturally inherent in all children, that is, an individual capacity or attribute (James, 2009; see also Greene & Nixon, 2020), and often used interchangeably with resistance (Abebe, 2019, p. 8). Criticism has arisen, however, regarding the traditional sociological accounts of agency as ignoring children's more subtle ways of expressing agency (Moran-Ellis, 2013; Valentine 2011). Likewise, the idea of agency as a child's property and a capacity children simply possess has been suggested to be better approached relationally, namely seeing

agency as developing through relations with others, not in isolation (Alanen, 2018; Esser et al., 2016; Punch, 2016; Sairanen et al., 2022; Spyrou, 2019).

To illustrate the interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship between generation and agency, Leonard (2016) advanced the work of Alanen (2009) and developed the concept of *generagency*. It can be divided into two sub-concepts: *inter-/intra-generagency* to understand "relational processes and the links between macro childhood and children's everyday lives" (Leonard, 2016, p. 132). The concept has recently gained attention, especially in the field of childhood and youth studies (e.g., Bacon, 2019; Horgan et al., 2020; Spyrou et al., 2023) and is also viewed in this study as a valuable framework for understanding children's opportunities for agency within the complex relations between children and parents. Inter-generagency underlines relations between children and adults and the importance of their different positioning and power in the generational order (Leonard, 2016). In families, the agency of both children and parents and the dynamics of bidirectionality need to be understood in the context of the long-term child–parent relationship, in which power asymmetry prevails (Kuczynski, 2003; see also Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015). Even though power asymmetry and control are undeniably rooted in the everyday interactions of children and parents, generational order is not inevitably either suppressive or authoritarian. However, Moran-Ellis (2013) notes that young children

> may be subject to far greater structural limitations than many other groups in society through three mechanisms: one is the nature of the institutionalisation of their lives; the second is the dominance of intergenerational relationships which position them as developmental actors and hence reposition their actions as material for learning and correcting; the third is their limited access to resources they can mobilise in support of their own intentions – the question of scope and scale of the contexts within which they can be agentic. (p. 315)

Indeed, as a social group, children appear subordinate to the adult group and thus, are assumed to occupy less powerful positions not only in families but in societies in general (Mayall, 2015). Moreover, young children in particular are highly dependent on their parents, or other adults, to ensure their basic needs are met, which also makes them especially vulnerable (Bagattini, 2019; Leonard, 2016). Children's vulnerability and dependency on the decisions that others make for them, without a doubt, restrict their opportunities for autonomous actions (Esser et al., 2016; Greene & Nixon, 2020). However, instead of seeing children's agency and dependency as conflicting, Bjerke (2011) suggests seeing them as part of the interconnected nature of child–parent relations, in which children's expressions of agency and dependency are entangled. Although children and parents have different resources to support their agentic actions (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015), children are by no means powerless. Children have, to varying degrees, the power to influence matters and decisions that concern them (Greene & Nixon, 2020; Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016). Thus, power dynamics in child–parent relations should not be conceptualized as a static hierarchy, that is, firmly top-down from parent to child.

2.2 Threefold conception of the child's agency

Following the notion of the "new" sociology of childhood, Kuczynski (2003) conceptualized child–parent relations as interdependent and bidirectional, wherein the power dynamics between child and parent are asymmetrical. Kuczynski (2003) perceived both children and parents as equally agentic but with different resources that they can draw on in their relations. This study adheres to Kuczynski's (2003) relational conceptualization of children's agency within child–parent relations. Kucynski (2003, p. 9) defines individuals as "actors with the ability to make sense of the environment, initiate change and make choices." He proposes deploying a triad of concepts, namely autonomy, construction, and action, to reflect the motivational, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of agency.

Autonomy refers to one's self-determination and capability to feel effective in interactions with others and one's environment (Kuczynski, 2003; see also De Mol et al., 2018). Ryan and Deci (2017) defined autonomy as personal control and argued that people fundamentally desire to experience ownership in their actions. This means individuals have a sense of their actions and thoughts being freely chosen and not defined, controlled, or manipulated by others. In child–parent relations, children's attempt to protect their freedom of actions and thoughts from parental authority manifests as resistance, through which even very young children are able to protect their autonomy when it is infringed upon (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 2021). In childhood studies, the child's agency as autonomy can be described with the sociological term "secondary adjustment" (Corsaro, 1997, 2018). This concept was originally introduced by Goffman (1961) and re-introduced later by Corsaro (1997, 2018). Goffman's theory of secondary adjustment concerned adults in total institutions, in other words, in oppressive circumstances, and how they were able to express autonomy and achieve control over their lives by violating the rules, expectations, and demands of the environment in a subtle or hidden way (Goffman, 1961). Thus, by engaging in practices that do not directly challenge the norms of authority, one can have a sense of being "still his own man" (Goffman, 1961, pp. 54–55). Corsaro (1997, 2018), instead, applied the concept in his descriptions of children's collective actions and strategies used in nursery school to escape and resist adult authority and culture. Thus, through secondary adjustments, children can skirt adults' rules and norms, achieve control, and thereby gain a sense of agency without challenging adults directly (Corsaro, 1997, 2018; Corsaro & Everitt, 2023). Hence, the concept of secondary adjustment portrays children as active agents able to creatively participate and resist adult culture (Corsaro, 1997, 2018; see also Donner et al., 2023; Yanık Özger, 2024). Kuczynski and colleagues (2018) concluded that ultimately, children's resistance is no different from that of adults; it is a display of self-determination and means to defend freedom of choice and action.

Agency as a construction refers to one's capability to make sense of one's own and others' behaviors, assign meaning to experiences, and construct new meanings from these experiences (Kuczynski 2003; see also De Mol et al., 2018).

Corsaro (2012; see also Corsaro & Everitt, 2023, p. 41) referred to this process in terms of "interpretive reproduction" to suggest "the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society" (p. 488). To make sense of the adult world, children interpret and construct meaning from their interactions with adults and actively contribute to society and cultural production and change, such as norms and values (Corsaro & Everitt, 2023). Agency can also be described as children's sense of themselves as agents (Greene & Nixon, 2020, p. 90) and thus, bringing out the children's ability for meaning-making. Because the focus of childhood studies is understanding children as members and agents in their communities and comprehending childhood as part of society and its structures (Alanen, 2009, p. 9), Kuczynski's (2003) approach to children's agency in the context of child–parent relations deepens the examination of agency in the family context.

From the triad, *agency as action* or agentic behavior is the most noticeable and usually described dimension of agency. With the concept of action, Kuczynski (2003) was referring to intentional, goal-oriented, and strategic features of behavior. Based on previous studies, children from the earliest ages are capable of acting purposefully and strategically in different social contexts, including in families (Kent, 2012; Kuczynski, 2003). By acting or withdrawing from acting, children can have an effect on others and change relational dynamics (De Mol et al., 2018; see also Schermerhorn et al., 2005).

In short, children's agency is approached in the present study as relational, meaning it is constructed, negotiated, and perceived to unfold in relations with others (e.g., Alanen, 2018; De Mol et al., 2018; Esser et al., 2016; Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015; Punch, 2016; Sairanen, 2020). It is seen as a multidimensional phenomenon that is both enabled and restricted in interactions within a social context, which in the present study is child–parent relations in Finland (see Bjerke, 2011; Horgan et al., 2020; Kuczynski, 2003; Sevón, 2015). Children's agency is not only equated with visible and concrete actions, such as children's resistance to parental authority or their ability to bring about change, but it is also interpreted as children's engagement with their life worlds. For example, in child–parent relations, children who comply with parental authority behaviorally may restore a sense of agency by not accepting their parents' rules and norms in their minds (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 2018). Likewise, children who follow parental rules and norms may themselves decide to do so (Leonard, 2016, p. 124). Thus, in the present study, the concept of child agency also comprises children's more subtle and invisible ways of expressing their agency (see Greene & Nixon, 2020; Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016; Moran-Ellis, 2013; Valentine, 2011). However, Leonard (2016) suggested that when discussing children's agency, there is also a need to consider "intentionality, reflectivity, intended (and unintended) consequences" (p. 124).

2.3 Participation and influence as manifestations of agency

In the present study, children's *participation* and *influence* are seen as manifestations of agency. The fundamental starting point for children's participation is the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989). In accordance with Article 12, children who are able to form their own views have a right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them. That is to say, children have a right to influence in everyday interactions and decisions that concern them (Lundy, 2018), including in situations where their views and opinions differ from those of adults. Article 12 has been considered of paramount importance when discussing "participation rights" (Shier, 2019) and is called the "Participation Article" although the term "participation" is not mentioned in the text of Article 12 (Horgan et al., 2020). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, however, states in General Comment No. 12, that the term "participation" is

> used to describe ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes. (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, para.3)

Viewed from these starting points, participation can be used to refer to social activities, in which children are offered opportunities to take initiative, make choices, and participate in decision-making in their social environment (Horgan et al., 2017; Horgan et al., 2020; Turja & Vuorisalo, 2022). Through participation, children not only realize their autonomy (Paron & Kutsar, 2023) but can also learn to practice democracy and the important skills needed to further civil society (Council of Europe, 2011; Horgan et al., 2020). This way of seeing children's participation is also adopted in this study. In contemporary families, from an early age many children can exercise their right to be heard and involved in decision-making (see Tomanovic, 2003). Children also have a right to care and protection (United Nations, 1989), which is often regarded as clashing with the right to participation (Alderson, 2010; Bosisi & Olagnero, 2019; Lundy, 2018). However, as the primary consideration in all actions affecting the child should be their best interests (United Nations, 1989; Article 3), children's right to protection and care can be supported only if children's voices and perspectives are also listened to and taken seriously (Alderson, 2010; Lundy, 2018; Sevón et al., 2021; 2024). Thus, in the present study, children's rights to care, participation, and protection are seen as intertwined, not mutually exclusive.

Children's participation has been conceptualized using several different typologies. One of the earliest and most influential models is Hart's (1992) "Ladder of Participation," inspired by Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, which has also been the theoretical starting point for many subsequent models. Hart's (1992) model identifies different forms of participation across eight rungs, beginning from non-participation to child-managed projects in which decisions are shared with adults. Along with the rungs, children's power, control, and

activity increases (Hart, 1992; see also Cahil & Dadvand, 2018). The bottom three rungs, "manipulation," "decoration," and "tokenism," represent different types of nonparticipatory practices, such as manipulating children's views, supporting children's ceremonial participation in adults' activities, and not listening to children sufficiently to offer them real opportunities to influence decision-making (Hart, 1992). The lowest rungs strengthen the power asymmetry in generational relations (Shier, 2019). Shier's (2001) model, influenced by Hart's ladder (1992), proposes five levels of participation, varying from children being listened to, to children sharing power and responsibility for decision-making (Shier, 2001, 2019). Such models with ladders and levels, however, have been misunderstood as a hierarchical continuum (Lundy, 2018). Likewise, they have been criticized for giving the impression of the higher levels as most desirable in all situations (Malone & Hartung, 2010; Shier, 2019). Instead of understanding the ascending rungs or levels as demonstrating increasingly desirable positions, Hart (2008) suggested seeing the rungs as representing diverse forms of children's (non)participation or engagement. Similarly, Shier (2001, 2019) defended hierarchical models by proposing that in real life, the level of participation varies within the same project or task and the correct level depends on the task at hand. Since Hart's (1992) ladder, several other models that avoid debate about hierarchies have been created, including those that focus on different modes of children's engagement (Lansdown, 2011) or that combine different dimensions and aspects of participation (Turja, 2020). Although there is consensus on the importance of children's participation, and as stated above, several theories aim to define it, the concept has been claimed to be multifaceted and difficult to implement in practice (Horgan et al., 2017; Percy-Smith et al., 2023; Valentine, 2011).

Lundy (2007) took a different stance and developed a rights-based model of participation. Even though the model was originally developed to approach children's participation in the public sphere, it also offers a valuable and holistic framework for understanding children's participation in the "less-observed private world of the family" (Alderson, 2010, p. 89), more precisely, in child–parent conflicts explored in the current study. *The Lundy model* (2007) provides a practical and theoretical understanding of Article 12 (United Nations, 1989) and comprises four interrelated elements: space, voice, audience, and influence. Despite the overlap between space and voice, and audience and influence, all the elements are critical to children's efficient and meaningful participation.

The Lundy model (2007) is based on the idea that children are active agents who have their own views. However, these views are often overlooked by adults who do not create a safe atmosphere, do not give information to children, and do not listen to or consider their initiatives and views, but instead they act adult-oriented. The first element of this model, *space,* is to create opportunities for children to express their views in a respectful and safe space free from insecurity and fear (Lundy, 2007; United Nations, 1989; see also Horgan et al., 2017). Lundy (2007) stated that adults should "take proactive steps to encourage children to express their views; that is, to invite and encourage their input rather than simply acting as a recipient of views if children happen to provide them" (p. 934). A safe

space is also a prerequisite for children to express their genuine views (Lansdown, 2010; Lundy, 2007). In child–parent relations, having a safe and encouraging space for the child to express their views is at particular risk in situations where the views and goals of the child and parent conflict (Beyens & Beullens, 2017; Sherill et al., 2017; Weaver et al., 2015).

The second element, *voice*, is to help children form and express their views freely, for example, by providing the information needed about available opportunities and supporting children in joining discussions and dialogues (Lundy, 2007, 2018; United Nations, 1989). When children have the requisite information, they are able to make informed decisions (Correia & Aguiar, 2022). Regarding child–adult discussions, Eriksson (2023) proposed the "Good Dialogues" model based on child-centered and child-guided dialogues. Although the "Good Dialogues" model was created for practitioners working in different organizational contexts, it could also be a valuable model in the private family sphere. However, since children's right to express their views is not dependent on their age, ability, or will to communicate verbally (Gal & Duramy, 2015; Lansdown, 2010; Lundy, 2007), adults need to identify children's different skills, preferences, and interests, irrespective of their age or gender, when encouraging them to use their voice (Correia & Aguiar, 2022). Regarding capturing children's perspectives, Murray (2019) called for plurality, namely, taking into account the multiplicity of children's voices instead of a single voice.

The development of the Lundy model was grounded in the idea that "voice is not enough,"; so, the third element is for adults to be an *audience* and listen sensitively to children's views expressed both verbally and non-verbally (Lundy, 2007; United Nations, 1989; see also Eriksson, 2023). This means that adults should go beyond merely hearing children and listen to their views actively. Especially when it comes to the youngest children, adults need to pay attention to children's various modalities of expression (Palaiologou, 2014; Salonen et al., 2022). The fourth element, *influence*, is to take children's views and perspectives seriously so that they are considered in the decision-making process (Lundy, 2007; United Nations, 1989). This requires adults to be open to being influenced by children's views (Lundy, 2007, 2018). Children's influence can be realized at different levels, ranging from not having any influence to being able to affect the outcome (Hart, 1992). In situations where the child's views do not influence the outcome, the adult should explain the rationale for their decisions (Lundy, 2007, 2018; see also Horgan et al., 2020).

This study suggests focusing on children's diverse ways of contributing to, acting, and achieving a sense of agency (see Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2023). Thus, in the present study, children's participation and influence in child–parent conflicts are seen as manifestations of agency. Sometimes, worrying discussions have arisen about the fact that with increasing participation and influence, children must take responsibility for matters they do not necessarily comprehend or will grow into controlling tyrants (Sihvonen, 2020; Weckström, 2022). However, when aiming to protect children from taking too much responsibility, their opportunities to influence matters important to them might even be overruled

(Weckström, 2022; see also Lundy, 2018). Similarly, although the balance of power between children and parents changes along with the increasing influence of the child, children's right to participation (United Nations, 1989) is not interpreted in this study to mean that all the children's wishes should be fulfilled or that they should be given the freedom to make independent decisions alone, especially if such decisions harm or ignore their parents' opinions (Correia & Aguiar, 2022; Hart, 2008; Lundy, 2007, 2018; Weckström et al., 2017). Thus, children's participation does not accord them the right to be in charge or exercise power over adults. Also, several studies suggest not to romanticize children merely as autonomous and competent agents who in each situation would act for productive or positive ends or whose agency would always be good for themselves or others (e.g., Greene and Nixon, 2020; Sutterlüty & Tisdall, 2019; Valentine, 2011). In this regard, Kirby and Gibs (2006) stated that sometimes children can be allowed to take more of the lead and sometimes adults need to be in a more directive position. Similarly, they advised adults to use creativity and wisdom when choosing suitable roles for children and adults since "there is no blueprint for this, only experience and reflection" (Kirby & Gibs, 2006, p. 219).

Most previous research on children's participation has focused on opportunities offered by formal structures, such as ECECs, schools, and communities (e.g., Lundy, 2007; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2023; Salonen et al., 2022; Waters-Davies et al., 2024). Children's opportunities for voice and influence in family contexts have attracted much less interest. However, the few studies that have listened to the voices of children from 7–17 years old about their opportunities for participation in families in Ireland (Horgan et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2018; see also Davey, 2010) and Nordic countries (Bjerke, 2011; Gurdal & Sorbring, 2018) suggested that although children experience child–parent relations as offering them opportunities for a voice in discussions, parents' perspectives are quite often prioritized over those of children, leading to the limited influence of the child. Studies examining young (4–8 years) Nordic children's views and perspectives of child–parent conflicts (Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009) found comparable results about the child's influence but also concluded that children were active agents in intergenerational conflicts. In several studies, however, instead of merely valuing getting their way, children have been reported to emphasize the importance of being listened to and understanding the process of decision-making (e.g., Davey, 2010; Horgan et al., 2020).

2.4   Power and children's responses to parental authority

Unequal power dynamics are an inevitable and natural part of everyday family life and child–parent relations, yet they have been found to manifest especially in intergenerational conflicts, which are the focus of this study (Recchia et al., 2010; Sevón, 2015). *Conflicts* are defined as social situations caused by incompatibility between the goals and views of the child and parent (Kuczynski et al., 2018; Persram et al., 2019; Sorbring, 2009). In this study, child–parent conflicts are

approached as a site for children's opportunities for agency, participation, and influence.

In child–parent relations, power often has negative connotations (Alderson & Yoshilda, 2016, p. 75) although it can also have positive, productive, and protective aspects (Gjerstad, 2009, p. 24). Consistent with the relational approach to child–parent relations (Alanen, 2009, 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015), the present study also applies a relational view of power (Allen, 2018; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; see also Della Porta, 2022). *Relational power* is derived from the individual's capability to influence another's actions and views in a meaningful way (Allen, 2018; see also Della Porta, 2022). Allen's (2018) feminist perspectives and definition of power as a prepositional triad—power-over, power-to, and power-with—serve as a helpful framework for understanding different dimensions of power in child–parent relations. *Power-over* manifests itself as the ability of an actor to dominate and limit the possibilities available to another actor to make choices (Allen, 2018, pp. 123–125). Parental power-over, which is often manifested as strict control and dominance, is easily justified in the name of the parent's task of raising the child (Sevón, 2015). This dimension of power, though, may sometimes be legitimate as a caring gesture and even necessary for the well-being of the child, for example when protecting children from harming themselves or others (Gjerstad, 2009, p. 38; Sevón, 2015). However, parental care, guidance, and protection may also turn into hidden control, manipulation, and suppression, which hinder young children's possibilities for agency in particular (see Millei, 2012; Moran-Ellis, 2013; Moran-Ellis & Sünker, 2018; Shier, 2019). Accordingly, as Haugaard (2020, p. 3) put it, power-over narrows the possibilities for actions of actors subjected to it despite the possible noble intentions or positive consequences. In this sense, this kind of power can be interpreted as suppressing agency (Alderson & Yoshida, 2016, p. 75).

With *power-to* Allen (2018, p. 125) means an actor's capacity or ability to act in response to or despite the power wielded over them by another actor to influence and bring about change. An actor can challenge and/or undermine the domination of another actor by resisting or negotiating and suggesting other options (Allen, 2018, p. 125; Gjerstad, 2009). Allen (2018, pp. 125–126) linked power-to in a Giddensian (1984, p. 15) way to an actor's resources and possibilities to be agentic, intervene, and act differently. Gjerstad (2009, p. 38), however, reminded us that the dimension of power-to is not always positive power if it results in the dimension of power-over. *Power-with,* instead, can be defined as the actors' ability to act mutually and in solidarity to achieve a joint agreement or shared end (Allen, 2018, p. 126). It is characterized by equality and collaboration and thus, power-with can be seen as referring to a joint power, a collective capacity to participate and empower (Allen, 2018, pp.126–129). Power-to and power-with can be linked to creative emancipating power that enables agency (Alderson & Yoshida, 2016, p. 75).

Children's responses to the use of parental power varies. The child may comply with the parent's requests and demands, resist, or try to negotiate (e.g., Kuczynski, 2003; Sevón, 2015). *Compliance* denotes the degree to which children

either do or refrain from doing what they are asked to do by their parents (Leijten et al., 2018). Reasons for the child's compliance vary, yet it is seen as an appropriate and normal response to parental requests and demands (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 2018). Kochanska (1995) and Kuczynski (2003) divided children's compliance into committed and situational compliance. Committed compliance refers to situations where the child willingly agrees with the parent and accepts and supports their agenda (Kochanska, 1995; Kuczynski, 2003). Indeed, children have been found to believe that parents have, and need to have, a legitimate authority to control and decide certain things and thus, value doing as expected (Sevón, 2015; Smetana et al., 2014; Zeyrek & Smetana, 2023). Situational compliance, instead, describes a situation in which the child does not truly agree or accept the parent's agenda but is pressured to comply by the parent (Kochanska, 1995). Yet, the child is able to act with agency and decide to comply (see Leonard, 2016, p. 124). By complying but not completely accepting parental authority, the child can protect a sense of autonomy and thus, this form of compliance can be equated with secondary adjustment and concealed ways of resisting the parent (Cavell & Strand, 2003; Corsaro & Everitt, 2023; Goffman, 1961). Situational compliance may also be tactical if the child complies with the parent in the hope of achieving more important aspirations in the future (Cavell & Strand, 2003; Kuczynski, 2003; see also Fang et al., 2023; Maccoby, 2014).

Resistance is traditionally interpreted as a negative and problematic behavior that should be suppressed. The contemporary definition of resistance or disobedience, however, suggests children's resistance could be defined as an agentic way of responding to perceived threats to one's autonomy (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 2018). In this view, children's resistance in child–parent relations could be seen as echoing their desire to protect their freedom of actions and thoughts when being controlled. Previous studies have identified that children from the earliest ages are able to resist their parents and their rules and norms in many ways. For example, in Kuczynski and colleagues' (1987) and Kuczynski and Kochanska's (1990) observational studies, 2–5-year-old American children resisted maternal directives by simply refusing, ignoring, defying, and negotiating. Parallel strategies of overt resistance toward parental authority have been identified in Nordic studies in relation to the perspectives of 4–10-year-old children on child–parent conflicts (Gurdal & Sorbring, 2018; Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009) and in studies that examined 9–19-year-old American children's strategies for expressing autonomy in the face of unwelcome parental demands (Kuczynski et al., 2018; Parkin& Kuczynski, 2012). These studies also found that children resist parents and their rules covertly, for example through cognitive non-acceptance. Taken together, the resistance of children from various age groups to parental authority in different socio-cultural contexts has been conceptualized, among other things, as overt and covert, direct or indirect, and constructive or non-constructive (Burke & Kuczynski, 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Robson & Kuczynski, 2018; Sevón, 2015).

Negotiation has been typically defined as a skillful and constructive way of resisting through which children strive both to achieve their own goals and to

find a mutually satisfactory accommodation with their parents (Della Porta et al., 2019; Kuczynski, 2018; Parkin & Kuczynski, 2012). Negotiation can include proposing bargains or compromises, offering persuasion or excuses, or asking for explanations, through which children attempt to create new options and outcomes (Kuczynski et al., 1987; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2023; Van Petegem et al., 2023). Compared to other forms of resistance, parents may experience children's negotiation as a more acceptable form of expressing agency and thus, it may evoke less parental control (Kuczynski, 2018; see also Flamant et al., 2024). Compared to child-initiated negotiations and dialogue, parent-initiated dialogue and guidance can be seen in a more problematic way from the perspective of power. Negotiations and dialogue, despite being regarded as a more egalitarian approach to reaching a joint agreement, are also the deployment of power, yet in a more hidden and subtle way (Millei, 2012; Moran-Ellis & Sünker, 2013). Questionable dialogue and guidance are found in situations where children's views and perspectives are listened to, but children eventually have no choice but to adapt to their parents' decisions and conform to their perspectives. So, Flamant and colleagues (2024) suggest autonomy-supportive communications and negotiations between children and parents. In such negotiations, parents do not engage in manipulative tactics but are genuinely interested in listening to children's perspectives, supporting their own initiatives and autonomous decision-making, and offering relevant reasoning to children when choices are restricted (Flamant et al., 2024; Soenens et al., 2007; see also Horgan et al., 2020).

2.5 Gender in young children's lives

Children's lives are profoundly shaped by gender from early in their development (Gansen & Martin, 2018; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). From birth, parents align children with societal expectations based on the child's biological sex and guide their behaviors according to stereotypical expectations of boys and girls (Baker et al., 2016; Endendijk et al., 2024; Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). The present study follows the currents sociological discussions and makes a distinction between the concepts of sex and gender. While the concept of "sex" is used to refer to different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, "gender" denotes socially influenced differences between males and females that are linked to masculinity and femininity (Lindsey, 2021; see also Greene & Nixon, 2020; Richardson, 2020). Children's lives, however, are not only shaped by the gender expectations and messages of the parents and other social environments but the children themselves also play an active part in their own lives by interpreting the messages they receive (Nielsen & Davies, 2017; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). Although gender is inevitably present in young children's lives and experiences, it has not received enough attention in childhood studies.

In this dissertation, *gender* is understood as socially constructed (Hellman & Heikkilä, 2014; Nielsen & Davies, 2017; Risman, 2018; Thorne, 2024). This

means that gender is an organizing principle of social orders that separates people into contrasting major categories: "boys" and "girls" and "men" and "women" (Lorber, 2008, 2022). The norms and characteristics connected to these categories (men-women/boys-girls) are typically defined by society's attitudes and expectations, varying across cultural, political, and historical contexts (Nielsen & Davies, 2017; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). From a social constructionist perspective, individuals create and recreate their gender, including their social realities, through their actions with others (Lorber, 2008, 2022; see also Risman, 2018). Thus, instead of regarding boys and girls as empty vessels, they should be viewed as active participants in constructing and reconstructing gender. Although there are always assumptions about how gender should be presented, Heikkilä (2021; 2016) suggested seeing gender as a flexible category displayed in diverse ways in different contexts and relationships. Also, for West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is not determined by sex but refers to behaviors associated with membership in a sex category. In their words, individuals "do gender," that is, perform gender in interactions through actions and language. Thus, gender is an accomplishment, not trait or variable, and gender differences are the outcome of what an individual does rather than what an individual is (West & Zimmerman, 1987; see also Butler, 1990).

Gender can also be seen as personally constructed which refers to personal experiences, in other words, something individuals feel about themselves (Nielsen & Davies, 2017; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). Children usually have a sense of their own gender as early as the age of 2–3 (Gansen & Martin, 2018; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). However, since children learn from birth socially acceptable ways of acting out and performing gender, they can be regarded as active constructors of gendered childhood (Gansen & Martin, 2018; Änggård, 2005; see also Keränen & Ylitapio-Mäntylä, 2024).

Complex relations between childhood and adulthood are impacted by gender, which plays a significant role in shaping power relations between the child and parent, in addition to other structural boundaries, such as age, class, and ethnicity (Leonard, 2016). Morrow's (2003) statement decades ago that family practices, including parenting, are gendered may still hold in the 2020s. For example, Yaffe (2023) found gender differences in his systematic review concerning mothers' and fathers' parenting styles around the globe. While mothers were found to be more behaviorally controlling, they also exercised a warmer type of parenting, were more supportive, autonomy-granting, and less harsh or coercive than fathers, who were found to be more authoritarian and maintain a traditional power hierarchy. Similar results concerning gender-related parenting in Western countries have been reported by other studies (Nelson et al., 2011; Smetana & Ahmad, 2018). The parent's gender, then, can have a significant impact on how child–parent power relations develop. There have been some conflicting findings, however, in studies conducted in Western societies (Milevsky et al., 2007), including in Nordic countries (Mikkonen et al., 2023; Olivari et al., 2015; Sorbring et al., 2021; Trifan et al., 2014), where mothers and fathers are found to be rather more alike than different in their parenting.

However, instead of seeing parents as realizing one kind of parenting style, Mikkonen and colleagues (2023) suggested seeing parents as having different ways of interacting in relations with their children.

Gender also intersects with childhood, which means that although children share the same structural position, they do not experience structural boundaries in uniform ways (Alanen, 2009; Leonard, 2016; Punch, 2020). The sub-concept intra-generagency from Leonard (2016) emphasizes this heterogeneity of children's everyday lives, including their diverse experiences of being a child. Thus, children's gender may play a meaningful role in their opportunities for agency in different social contexts, including in families.

Agency has usually been connected to males and masculine characteristics, such as power, efficiency, status, strength, and determination (Greene & Nixon, 2020; Hourigan, 2021). Thus, traits linked to male competence are typically referred to with agentic characteristics (Blakemore et al., 2009, pp. 7–8). Predictably, such attributes have been associated with boys more than girls. However, such gendered distinction in terms of equity of success and opportunities for agency is unfavorable for girls (Watson et al., 2023). Gender stereotypes portray girls as nurturing, dependent, emotionally expressive, and empathetic, and they should avoid being rebellious or dominant (Baker et al., 2016; Eagly, 1987; Hourigan, 2021; Kollmayer et al., 2018; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023; Williams & Best, 1990). Thus, traits linked to female competence are typically referred to as expressive or communal (Blakemore et al., 2009, pp. 7–8). Boys, instead, should be autonomous, competitive, independent, aggressive, dominant, active, and emotionally reserved (Eagly & Wood, 1991; Greene & Nixon, 2020; Hourigan, 2021; Kimmel, 2011; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). Children's different environments have been frequently found to emphasize binary views of gender, meaning that from an early age, they learn these different expectations related to masculinity and femininity and absorb gendered ways of expressing their agency (see Baker et al., 2016; Blakemore et al., 2009; Eagly, 1987; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). Children, therefore, learn how "boyhood" and "girlhood" should or might need to be expressed (Heikkilä, 2021). However, if boys are required to engage merely in independent and autonomous actions and girls are expected to focus on others, the prevailing gender expectations not only limit children's expressions of agency but also perpetuate narrow conventions related to both boys and girls.

Previous studies have suggested that children's expressions of agency vary between girls and boys in different behavioral realms (e.g., Baker et al., 2016; Hine, 2024). For example, Kuczynski and Kochanska (1990) found in their US study that young girls were more immediately compliant to maternal directives than boys, who instead were more difficult to control. Indeed, there is evidence that even today, girls still strive to meet the expectations related to being the "good" and "nice" girl and act accordingly (Greene & Nixon, 2020). Morawska (2020) reported in her systematic review concerning child–parent relations and parenting that boys are more aggressive than girls, yet boys are also more phys-ically controlled compared to girls, especially when they disobey (McFadyen-

Ketchum et al., 1996). Although Greene and Nixon (2020, p. 159) argued that the evidence of different kinds of reinforcement of agency for boys and girls is sparse, they suggested that it can be inferred from several studies that have used concepts linked to agency. Also, the studies that have employed the concept of agency have reported supportive findings about differential encouragement of agency in boys and girls. For example, 8-year-old Swedish children in Sorbring's (2009) study believed that boys are treated more severely than girls in child–parent conflicts. In a similar study, boys ascribed more power to children, and girls ascribed more power to parents. Comparable findings about the differences in parental control between boys and girls have also been reported elsewhere (e.g., Endendijk et al., 2017; Kochanska et al., 2009; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2009; cf. Endendijk et al., 2016). Mandara and colleagues (2012) also found that parents tend to be more autonomy-supportive with girls than boys. Indeed, there seems to be evidence that parents may adopt different parental practices with boys and girls (Blakemore et al., 2009). Differential parenting that socializes children to different roles provides a framework for transmitting and maintaining traditional gender role stereotypes (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018; Morawska, 2020).

3   AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Young children's perspectives about child–parent conflicts have seldom been researched. It may be that children's views have not been considered interesting and reliable (see Puroila et al., 2012a) or they have remained underrepresented owing to methodological challenges (DeCosta et al., 2023). In narrative research, young children have remained at the margins because their linguistic development has been viewed as restricted (Jennings-Tallant, 2019; Karjalainen & Puroila, 2017; Tallant, 2015). Likewise, research on child–parent relations has traditionally focused on parenting and parental practices, and how they impact children (e.g., Cho et al., 2024; Jin, 2023; Sarwar, 2016). Such approaches position parents as active agents and disregard young children's agency. Indeed, a large part of what we know about everyday child–parent conflicts has been obtained through observational studies or the examination of parents' perspectives (e.g., Aronsson, 2018; Boyer et al., 2015; Della Porta et al., 2022; Hedegaard, 2018; Nelson et al., 2019; Rechhia et al., 2010), and thus, research on children's understanding about child agency in intergenerational conflicts is still very limited. Children have also been approached as a homogeneous group, leaving possible gender differences unexplored. Hence, there has been a call for studies focusing also on the gendered aspect of child–parent conflicts (Sevón, 2015).

The overarching aim of the present study was to fill the gaps in the literature and offer novel insights into how 3–6-year-old Finnish children narrate, make sense of, and understand child-parent conflicts from a generagency perspective. Generagency captures the relationships among generation, gender, and children's agency. The following two research questions were established:

1) How do 3–6-year-old children describe the child's opportunities for agency in different story types of fictional child–parent conflicts?

2) How do 3–6-year-old boys' and girls' descriptions of the child's opportunities for agency differ in different story types?

To answer the research questions, the children's narratives of child–parent conflicts were examined in three interconnected sub-studies. Figure 1 displays the overarching aim of this study, its two research questions, and their connections to the three sub-studies and their separate research questions. Sub-study I concentrated on 3–6-year-old boys' narratives of child–parent conflicts and explored what story types can be identified in their narratives. The study also investigated how young boys describe a child's participation in the different story types. Sub-study II, in turn, focused on what story types can be identified in 4–6-year-old girls' narratives of child–parent conflicts. The study explored how young girls position the child and parent in relation to agency and power in different story types. Examining boys' and girls' narratives separately in sub-studies I and II showed that the stories have similarities and differences in structure and content, especially concerning the child's agency. This observation served as the starting point for sub-study III, the aim of which was to identify different story types in the children's narratives about child–parent conflicts and examine from a gender perspective the differences in the children's narration of the child's agency and opportunities for influence in these different story types. Together, all three sub-studies addressed the two research questions set for this dissertation study and thus, contributed to the overarching research aim.

RESEARCH AIM	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	SUB-STUDY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To offer novel insights into how 3–6-year-old Finnish children narrate, make sense of, and understand child-parent conflicts from a generagency perspective.

(1) How do 3–6-year-old children describe the child's opportunities for agency in different story types of fictional child–parent conflicts?

(2) How do 3–6-year-old boys' and girls' descriptions of the child's opportunities for agency differ in different story types?

Sub-study I
(1) What story types can be identified in 3–6-year-old boys' narratives of child–parent conflicts?
(2) How is the child character's participation described in these story types?

Sub-study II
(1) What story types can be identified in the narratives of girls aged 4–6 about child–parent conflicts?
(2) How do these girls position the child and parent characters in relation to agency and power in the different story types?
(3) What role does gender play in these different story types?

Sub-study III
(1) What story types can be identified in the young children's (3-6 years) narratives about child–parent conflicts?
(2) How do boys and girls describe the child character's agency and opportunities for influence in different story types, and how do their descriptions differ?

FIGURE 1   The research aim, research questions, and connections to sub-studies I–III

4   METHODS

4.1   Narrativity in this study

This dissertation adopted a *narrative approach* as a theoretical-methodological framework to access the life worlds of young children (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Moran et al., 2021a; see also Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022) and to approach the over-arching aim of providing novel insights into how young children make sense of and understand conflicts between children and parents from a generagency perspective. Narrativity also informed the research questions, what kind of data was generated and from whom, how it was analyzed, and how the findings were reported. Therefore, in the present study, narrativity was part of the entire research process (Heikkinen, 2018).

Questions concerning ontology, that is, the nature of social reality, and epistemology, in other words, how knowledge of this reality can be obtained (Blaikie & Priest, 2017), were fundamental as they influenced every stage of the research. The narrative approach has its ontological and epistemological foundations firmly rooted in social constructionism. Social constructionism highlights that social reality is not an objective entity but constructed in interaction, language, and social processes between humans and is contingent on the times and culture in which we live (Burr & Dick, 2017; Heikkinen, 2018). Similarly, the "new" sociology of childhood maintains that childhood is socially constructed and thus, the approach to childhood(s), including agency, is strongly influenced by social constructionism (Alanen, 2015; Greene & Nixon, 2020). Accordingly, the present study also approaches gender as socially constructed (e.g., Hellman & Heikkilä, 2014; Thorne, 2024). In this study, children's narratives were not interpreted as representing objective reality or authentic truths (Burr & Dick, 2017; see also Eldén, 2013) but constituting a relativist and subjective reality (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 208). Children were not asked to narrate their own experiences but to tell stories based on imaginary picture cards. Rooted in real or

imagined events, children's narratives offer one way to enter their worlds (i.e., children's thoughts and emotions), and get insights into their realities (Engel, 2005; Moran et al., 2021a). It is also important to note that as a researcher, I was actively participating in constructing the knowledge of children's realities, and thus, narratives were constructed in a dialogical interaction as part of the larger sociocultural setting (Heikkinen, 2018; Riessman, 2008, p. 8). Children's narratives, then, can be described as a production of a "joint imagination" (Heller, 2019, p. 168) and "co-produced" (Tisdall, 2017).

Assumptions related to ontology and epistemology also affect how children are perceived and positioned by the researcher (Karlsson, 2012; see also Alanen, 2017; Strandell, 2012), just as the researcher's perception of the child influences ontological and epistemological considerations. In line with the current notion of childhood studies (Mayall, 2015) and the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989), children were seen as social actors and experts in their own lives with the capacity to influence and change the world through participation and interaction (Corsaro & Everitt, 2023; Greene & Nixon, 2020). This paradigm positions children as active participants in constructing and creating complex interpretations and understandings of the world around them (Brady & Graham, 2019; Leonard, 2016; Lundy et al., 2024), as well as emphasizes the importance of listening to the voices and perspectives of children. Similarly, this study perceives children as valued research participants and informants, whose narration merits listening to. Such a perception of the child is also intertwined in this study with all the decisions made in the research process, from formulating the aim to interpreting the results and reporting the findings (Karlsson, 2012, pp. 23–24).

In the narrative approach, all humans are seen as natural storytellers who express meanings through stories (Abbott, 2020). The ability to narrate is neither related to, among other things, gender or context, nor is it limited merely to verbal accounts; it also includes other communicative means (Engel, 2005; Moran et al., 2021a, pp. 1–2; Rollins, 2024). Consequently, in the present study, children were seen as giving meaning to their experiences and constructing the reality around them through narrating, namely, through telling stories and playing. In Moran et al.'s (2021a, p. 2) words, "stories form part of everyday life, providing portals to explore the (often) imaginative worlds offered by and through the lens of a story". Stories also offer children a safe place to explore issues that might be socially and emotionally challenging, taboo, or otherwise difficult to process (Koivula et al., 2020; Rollins, 2024). From these starting points, narrativity was seen as an innovative approach to gain insights into young children's understanding of the sensitive phenomena of child–parent conflicts.

While the concepts of "*story*" and "*narrative*" are often used interchangeably (Riessman, 2008; Spector-Mersel, 2010), a distinction is made between them in this study. Following the conceptualization of Abbott (2020, p. 18) and Heikkinen (2018), narratives are seen as representations of events that consist of a story, that is, an event or sequence of events and characters, and a narrative discourse, in other words, events as represented. For Engel (1995, p. 19), the narrative is

embedded in interaction and discussion, and thus, purposelessly constructed, while the story is being told intentionally. Also, in this study, the children's narratives can be regarded as a production of the encounters between the child and the researcher, during which the stories on child–parent conflicts were intentionally constructed.

Children's narratives always bring into focus different structural boundaries, such as class, gender, and ethnicity, and how they shape, reflect, and generate complexities in storytelling (see Moran et al., 2021a; Nicolopoulou, 2011). In the research over the past couple of decades, differences have been found in young boys' and girls' stories, both in the content and structure. For example, when examining 3–5-year-old preschool children's spontaneous stories, Nicolopoulou (2008, 2011) found that boys preferred non-coherence, including disharmony, disruption, complexity, and social disorder. Girls, instead, favored coherence, including harmonious and stable relations, and tended to restore order before ending the story. Also, Gardner-Neblett and Sideris's (2018) and Vretudaki's (2022) studies provided evidence of preschool-age girls' stories being more coherent and organized compared to boys' stories.

Libby and Aries (1989) found when examining young children's fantasy stories that 3-year-old boys introduced more aggressive characters, the protagonist was more often a male, and the central character was never female. Boys centralized coping with aggressive ambitions and directing them into attempts at mastery. Similar-aged girls presented more cooperative and friendly characters in their stories and focused on caretaking and responding to the needs of others. The protagonist was most often a female in the girls' stories. Aggressive elements, including descriptions of power, have been found to be more typical in young boys' stories in other studies (e.g., Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Bacigalupa & Wright, 2009; Peirce & Edwards, 1988). Similarly, studies of young children's play have found gender differences, revealing that boys engage more in rough, loud, and boisterous play, and girls in harmonious play related to family themes (e.g., Li & Wong, 2016; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023; Wood & Cook, 2009). Such gendered play is, to say the least, more or less expected social behavior for boys and girls (Heikkilä, 2021). Based on these findings, one could argue that constructing knowledge and making sense through narrating is, at least in some way, gendered.

4.2 Story Magician's Play Time: A method for listening to children's perspectives

The research data in this study was generated with the narrative and playful *SMPT method* (Koivula et al., 2020; Turja & Laakso, 2011). This intervention method was originally developed at the University of Jyväskylä by Turja and Laakso as part of the rehabilitation practice for listening to the experiences and perspectives of young children (aged 4-6) who exhibit hyperactive and

challenging behavior (Koivula et al., 2020; Turja & Laakso, 2011). Since then, the method has been utilized in research when examining, for example, young children's narratives of exclusion in peer relationships in ECEC (Sevón et al., 2023). The method supports children in communicating their views about socially challenging situations through storytelling and play without jeopardizing children's sense of security. The method utilizes pictures, emotion cards, props, and a hand puppet at the beginning and end of the session (Koivula et al., 2020; Turja & Laakso, 2011). The starting point of the method is to offer inherent ways for children to make sense of their worlds, increase meaningful participation, and above all, empower children (Turja & Laakso, 2011). Methods that respect children's competencies and strengths also balance the power asymmetry between the child participant and adult researcher. The SMPT session consists of three phases (see Figure 2).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Narrating a story based on a picture card	Playing the narrated story with props	Reflecting on the moral of the story and one's own experiences
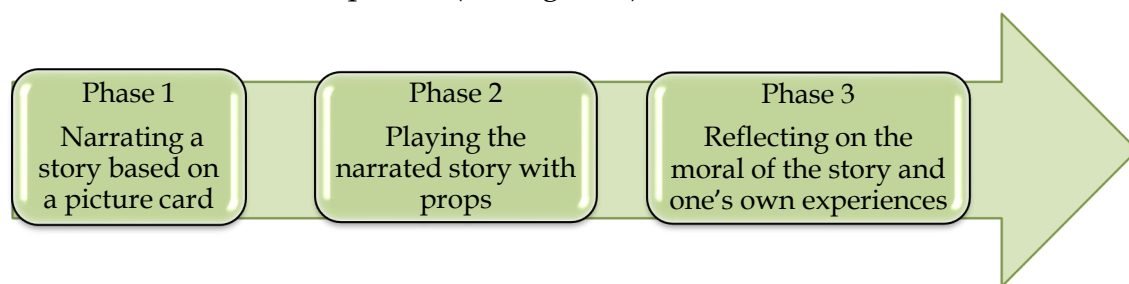
FIGURE 2   Phases of the Story Magician's Play Time session

First, the child is presented with different picture cards depicting a socially challenging situation, from which they are asked to choose one as the basis for storytelling. The different picture cards act as storytelling vignettes or "triggers" (Palaiologou, 2017). The child is encouraged to narrate a story about the events and imaginary characters in the picture and their views and feelings without having to talk about their personal experiences. Different emotion cards are used to concretize the emotions of the characters and facilitate the discussion related to them (Chen & Adams, 2023). If the child's story does not end happily from the point of view of the parties, the child is asked to think about how such an outcome could be achieved. Second, the narrated story is acted out using different props, such as story frames, dolls, and furniture. With the permission of the child, the researcher joins the play and acts out the character(s) the child gives them. Play is used as part of the SMPT session not just because it is a natural channel for young children to express themselves, but also narrating by playing can be easier and more interesting for some children than simple verbal narrating based on pictures (see Delfos, 2023; Engel, 1995). Likewise, children with limited abilities and/or will to communicate verbally or children who are shy benefit from being offered different ways to express themselves (Stafford, 2017). Finally, after playing, the hand puppet, which was introduced at the beginning of the session and left to listen to and follow the session, asks the child what they think was important in their story, whether the child has ever been in a similar situation,

and what could be learned from their story (Koivula et al., 2020; Turja & Laakso, 2011).

4.3 Collecting young children's stories of child–parent conflicts

After obtaining official permissions and signed informed consent from guardians, I met the participating children in small groups in their ECEC centers before starting the empirical work. During these meetings, I introduced myself to the children and explained my presence. I familiarized them with the nature of the study, its phases, and the data collection method. The children were also introduced to the props, emotion cards, and the hand puppet, as well as the audio and video recorders to be used during the SMPT sessions. In similar meetings, I explained to the children what would happen with the data, who might see the results, as well as the confidentiality and secure storage of their stories and their ability to refuse or discontinue participation and recording the session without consequences at any time during the study (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019). I informed the children in an age-appropriate way as concretely and simply as possible and acted sensitively and respectfully. These meetings aimed to promote the children's informed decisions about participating in the study and offer them opportunities to ask questions and engage in discussions in a comfortable and encouraging space. The goal was also to facilitate the children's feelings of safety and build trust with an unfamiliar adult.

In the present study, each SMPT session began by presenting the child with a gender-neutral monkey hand puppet with a gender-neutral name, 'Illi.' According to Rollins (2024, p. 104), a gender-neutral puppet may strengthen the bond between the child and the puppet better than using a puppet of the opposite gender. Illi and the child got to know each other better by talking about, for example, its favorite foods and activities. The aim of the hand puppet was to create a safe and cozy atmosphere and to encourage children's self-expression (Coyne et al., 2021; Kröger & Nupponen, 2019; van der Hoeven et al., 2021). The participating children were clearly excited about the puppet; most of them asked it questions and wanted to hug it, stroke it, and hold it (see Koivula et al., 2020). Because I, as a researcher, did not want to predetermine the participating child's gender, the hand puppet also pondered with the child both Illi's and the child's gender. Illi "questioned" the child about their own gender: whether they thought they were a boy, a girl, something else, or they did not know. All the participating children self-identified either as boys or girls. Illi also explained that it had joined the session because of its interest in listening to children's stories. It also emphasized that no wrong kind of stories existed, but each story was unique and important. Then, I presented the child with seven different picture cards depicting hypothetical but familiar everyday conflicts that can arise in families (see Appendix 1). All seven pictures were presented to each participating child. The picture cards were designed based on previous Nordic studies of typical child–parent conflicts (Aronsson, 2018; Grieshaber, 2004; Hedegaard, 2018; Sevón,

2015; Sorbring, 2009) and were drawn in collaboration with illustrator Jauri Laakkonen. The pictures demonstrated the following conflict situations: using a tablet, brushing teeth and bedtime, behavior in a supermarket, putting away toys, behavior at mealtimes, dressing, and going to the ECEC center/preschool. The children, however, were not verbally steered to narrate a conflict but to tell a story based on a picture describing familiar situations children might encounter on a daily basis. Because I was also interested in the gendered aspect of the topic, the two imaginary characters in the pictures were drawn without hair and wearing clothes in non-stereotypical gendered colors (see Hourigan, 2021; Nash & Sidhu, 2023). The child was told the characters were bald so that the child could determine their appearance.

After choosing one picture card as the basis for telling a story, I encouraged the child to freely narrate the events, causes, and consequences of the actions, as well as the characters and their feelings. Six different emotion cards depicting joy, sorrow, anger, fear, embarrassment, and astonishment were used, to help the child in naming and discussing the characters' conflict-related feelings (see Appendix 2). My role was to actively listen to the child's narration and ask only supplementary questions, such as "What might happen in this picture?" or "How might the characters feel?" to facilitate the development of the narration but not to lead it in any specific direction. Thus, the child was an active agent in controlling the kind of information they disclosed (Moran et al., 2021b, p. 422; Palaiologou, 2017). However, to avoid ending the session with the characters' sadness or bad mood, the children were asked about the conditions for a happy ending from the perspective of all the characters.

After the child felt their narrated story was ready, I played it together with the child. Each play proceeded according to the child's instructions: they chose which character each of us played, what the characters said, and how they acted. I accompanied and followed the child's initiative and only asked for the child's instructions for the character's actions and dialogue. Finally, at the session's end, the child reflected, with the help of Illi the puppet, on the moral of the story and whether the child had ever been in a similar situation. In previous studies (Butschi & Hedderich 2021; Coyne et al., 2021), children were found to perceive puppets as equals or peers with whom their thoughts may be shared more easily than with adult researchers. In this study as well, the hand puppet encouraged children to engage in dialogue and shifted the balance of power between the young children and me. Appendix 3 contains a snapshot of the constructed play situation and the hand puppet.

As a rule, the children were active and enthusiastic agents in participating in the SMPT sessions. I often thought the children enjoyed the one-on-one time with me and genuinely felt able to express their views freely, which were also listened to and respected. In this sense, the value of the SMPT method was especially in strengthening children's participation and empowering them (Koivula et al., 2020; Turja & Laakso, 2011; see also Kim, 2016). Interestingly, girls in particular were excited to talk about this and that, for example, the researcher's jewelry, before and during the SMPT sessions. At the beginning of the session,

two boys expressed their desire to narrate a story but not play it. In such situations, I respected the child's wishes and acted accordingly. Although the idea of the SMPT method is that the child narrates a story from one picture card during one session, some children were eager to narrate several stories based on several picture cards. A few children also narrated one story for which they sought inspiration from several different picture cards. Most of the children seemed to especially enjoy playing the story: they spent a lot of time getting to know the props, which really fascinated them, and building the play. While most children played the story as they had narrated it, some created a new story in their play from a completely different topic than child–parent conflicts, such as having a birthday party for a younger sibling.

Since providing assent is an ongoing process (Water, 2024), I reminded each child before and during the session about the ongoing research and asked for their continued assent. None of the children, however, discontinued their participation or refused to record the session. Also, playful contract papers were filled out with all the children to show them that their assent is important (see Appendix 4). Each child could come up with a secret name for themselves and confirm their assent with their fingerprints. One contract paper was given to the child and one to the researcher. Since the institutional structures automatically place children and adults in certain positions, it was important to emphasize to the children that I was a "different kind of adult," not an ECEC teacher (Atkinson, 2019; Kiili et al., 2024). Thus, when interacting with the children, I avoided positioning myself as an adult authority, which might have hindered their opportunities to express their views freely. However, I did not try to assume a "least adult role" either (Atkinson, 2019) but rather one of a safe, reliable, and responsible adult researcher who respects children's views and is eager to gain insights into their world. During the sessions, we, for example, sat next to each other and the child was free to narrate and play according to their preferences. Therefore, the child's opportunities to participate were not limited when establishing the institutional order (see Salonen et al., 2022).

During each session, I emphasized to the child they could decide freely what kind of story they wished to narrate and whether they wanted to both narrate it and act it out. I also stressed they could decide when they wanted to end the session. Moreover, I remained alert to non-verbal signals indicating, for example, the child's possible loss of enthusiasm and hence, likely wish to renegotiate or end their participation. So, I was sensitized to listening, hearing, seeing, and responding to the children's different ways of expressing themselves verbally and with gestures and actions (see Palaiologou, 2014). In a few cases, the child seemed to get tired during the session. Thus, I sensitively inquired whether the child felt they were finished and wanted to return to regular ECEC activities. In such a situation, the child took the initiative to end the session. More commonly, however, the child verbally expressed their willingness to end the session. Situations in which the child did not hesitate to express their views and feelings freely can be interpreted as an indication that the research environment made the child feel safe and free to express themselves (Lundy, 2007). At the end

of data collection, each child was asked if they would like to have a summary of their story as a memory, either in their guardian's email or as a hard copy in a sealed envelope through their ECEC center. They were also informed that this would likely lead to their guardian also reading the story. Almost all the children wanted to receive a summary of their story, primarily through their parent's email. The participating children were also given a little gift.

The data collection was conducted in the children's ECEC centers in 2019 and 2020. Each child participated in one to three child-specific sessions carried out in a quiet and separate space in their ECEC center. Although each session was unique and differed from the next, the procedure proceeded similarly with each child. The children participated in the SMPT sessions in a random order, according to the schedule allowed by the routines and rhythms of the ECEC center. However, in situations where the child participated more than twice, similarities in the content of the stories were found. Thus, it may not be easy for a young child to come up with completely different stories around the same theme, despite the differences between the picture cards. The duration of the sessions varied from 18–86 minutes (41-minute average). In total, about 52 hours and 16 minutes of audio and video data were gathered. The audio data was transcribed (589 pages), pseudonymized, and analyzed. The need to use video material was rare; this was only done if the child's non-verbal communication was needed to confirm the interpretations. The language used, both during the SMPT sessions and in transcribing, was Finnish.

4.4   Participating children

To recruit 4–7-year-old children for this study, three ECEC centers were contacted. In total, 45 Finnish children participated in this study, of whom 19 self-identified as boys and 26 as girls. The children were from 3–6 years old. One child (boy) was 3 years old, 19 were four years old, 14 were 5 years old, and 11 were 6 years old. Most of the children, both boys and girls, were 4. Despite the ECEC centers representing residential areas of different demographics, the children's sample was rather homogenous: 26 children were from families where both parents had tertiary education, 12 from families with one tertiary-educated parent, and 7 lived in a family with no tertiary-educated parent. There were 40 children who lived in nuclear families, 4 in divorced families, and 1 in a blended family. Because children, for example, with an immigrant background did not participate in this study, the typical participant was a non-immigrant Finnish-speaking child from a nuclear high-socioeconomic status family. Such homogeneity was likely due to several factors. First, the research invitations were distributed to the parents by the ECEC staff. Although I asked them to distribute the invitations to parents of children from different backgrounds, I was not told to whom the invitations were given. Second, at the time of the study, according to the staff, few children with immigrant backgrounds were attending ECEC. Moreover, the fact that the research information was in Finnish may have

influenced participation. Likewise, cultural and ethnic factors may also have affected who was permitted to participate. However, it is difficult to say who the children are who, for one reason or another, did not either receive research permission from their parents or who themselves were not interested in participating.

4.5 Analysis of the sub-studies

All the research data for this study was collected before the data analysis. The study applied the principles of narrative research (Abbott, 2020; Heikkinen, 2018) and investigated from a gendered perspective how young children interpret, make sense of, and understand conflicts between children and parents. Since methods of analysis never emerge from a vacuum (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012), they were chosen in line with the research aim and focus set in each sub-study. During the process of developing an understanding of multidimensional children's narratives, the data analysis was closely intertwined with interpretation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). The process of analyzing and interpreting the data started in this study when I generated the data with the children and then transcribed it. Since all the participating children narrated at least one child–parent conflict story, but not all of them wanted to play it or played completely different stories from different topics, I focused on the children's verbally narrated stories in the analysis. In this sense, the narrative research with young children was linguistically oriented. I read through the transcriptions several times and wrote short summaries of the imaginary child–parent conflicts, their proceedings, and the characters involved. This phase helped familiarize me with the broad and multidimensional dataset and also showed me that although all the children's narratives did not fit into the traditional notion of "good" narratives, in other words, having a complete story structure (see Puroila et al., 2012a), they nonetheless formed temporal and plot-relevant entities. In this study, narratives are used to refer to the data and its transcribed form (i.e., concrete research data). Stories and story types were able to be identified from the narratives through analysis. Since the same narrative could be comprised of more than one story, narrative, then, is defined as a broader concept than a story (Abbott, 2020; Heikkinen, 2018).

Riessman (2008) presented four broad approaches to narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic/performative, and visual. Since the interest in the present study was both in the content of the stories (what was told) and structure (how was it told), both thematic and structural analysis was applied. The summary of the methods of analysis of all three sub-studies is introduced in Table 1. A more precise description of the analysis will be presented separately and chronologically below.

TABLE 1   Summary of analysis methods of each sub-study

Study	Analysis methods
Sub-study I	Labov's structural analysis (1976), analysis of the realization of the elements of participation (Lundy, 2007)
Sub-study II	Labov's structural analysis (1976), storyline from Gergen and Gergen (1988), Bamberg's model of identity navigation (2020)
Sub-study III	A detailed analysis of the difference between boys' and girls' stories about a child character's expressions of agency and the repertoire of strategies for expressing resistance

First, all the children's narratives (*n=78*) were individually subjected to structural narrative analysis (Labov, 1976) to identify their basic structures. According to Labov (1976), all narratives have formal properties, with each having a specific function. From these different properties, this study focused on four: orientation, complicating action, evaluation, and resolution. First, *orientation* includes clauses that offer the listener information about elements such as the setting and the characters, including their behavior (Labov, 1976). In the children's narratives, the setting was always a conflict between the characters, that is, between the child and the parent: the child wanted (to do) something the parent forbade or the parent required the child to act in a way the child perceived to be against their interest. Second, *complicating action* refers to an ensuing sequence of events (Labov, 1976) and can be seen as including clauses that create "tensions that keep auditors listening" (De Fina & Johnstone, 2015, p. 83). Complicating action involves the child and parent character's responses to the situation and initiated actions.

Following complicating action is the *evaluation,* which refers to the assessment of the course of the events (Labov, 1976). The evaluation was displayed when the children described the emotions of the characters involved in the conflict. The narrated emotions of the child were seen as an expression of their views and interpreted accordingly: happiness and joy were interpreted as indicating that opportunities for participation, agency, and influence had existed for the child, and anger and sorrow as signifying constraints on the child's agency, participation, and influence. Fourth, *resolution* refers to the conclusion of the narratives (Labov, 1976) and release of tension (De Fina & Johnstone, 2015, p. 83). In the children's narratives, the resolution revealed which characters in the conflict changed or had to change their behavior and how, and who could influence whom and how. The resolution of the stories revealed it was most often the child who changed or had to change their behavior. Appendix 5 includes an example story of how Labov's model was applied.

With this phase of the analysis, it was possible to identify a total of 104 stories of child–parent conflicts, of which 43 were narrated by boys and 61 by girls. Since this phase brought out differences both in the content and structure of the stories based on gender, slightly different analytic questions were employed for analyzing boys' and girls' stories. This was done to get a more

nuanced and comprehensive picture of the multidimensional concepts of children's agency, participation, and influence in child–parent conflicts. The further stages of the analysis focused more closely first on the stories of boys (sub-study I), then the stories of girls (sub-study II), and finally examined both the boys' and girls' stories together (sub-study III).

Sub-study I examined children's opportunities to participate in child–parent conflicts as revealed in young boys' narratives (Lahtinen et al., 2023a). The dataset consisted of 43 child–parent conflict stories. After subjecting the boys' narratives to Labov's (1976) structural analysis, each story was analyzed with Lundy's (2007) elements of participation (space, voice, audience, and influence) and how they were realized in each story. Space focused on the atmosphere and whether it was described as encouraging for the child character to form and express their views. Voice concerned whether the child was narrated as being able to express their views, and audience was related to whether the child was described as actively being listened to by the parent. Influence pertained to whether the child's views were narrated as being taken seriously so that they influenced the outcome or led the parent to justify their decisions. The gender of the characters in the stories was also considered. After comparing the distinct stories and scrutinizing their differences and similarities, four different story types were formulated: ignored participation, parent-directed participation, child-directed participation, and dialogical participation stories. The story types differed based on their plot structure and how the elements of participation were realized.

Sub-study II explored the child's agency and power in the child–parent conflicts as revealed in the young girls' narratives (Lahtinen et al., 2023b). The data set consisted of 61 stories. After subjecting the girls' narratives to Labov's (1976) structural analysis, each story was further analyzed by adopting a narrative procedure of storylines from Gergen and Gergen (1988). This phase of the analysis was done to examine more precisely how the conflict evolved and which factors directed the conflict either toward or away from the desired outcome of the child character. According to Gergen and Gergen (1988), it is possible to see various events as moving through evaluative space in the narratives. Thus, when the child character was described as achieving a valued outcome, the storyline became positive and was manifested in the child as feelings of happiness and joy. When the child character was described as not achieving a valued outcome, the storyline became negative, as evidenced by feelings of anger and sadness. According to Gergen and Gergen (1988), all plots can transform into progressive, regressive, and stable based on evaluative shifts over time, creating more complex variations, such as comedy, romance, tragedy, and "happily-ever-after." In addition to identifying a stable narrative form, I also identified comedy, romance, tragedy, and "romanticized tragedy" based on the storylines of the narratives.

Gergen and Gergen's (1988) narrative procedure indicated the need to examine the positions and roles of the child and parent in more detail. Thus, I applied Bamberg's (2020) model of identity navigation, involving three sets of

binary oppositions: sameness–difference, agency–passivity, and continuity–change. First, I evaluated whether the child and parent characters' positions were described through sameness or difference. Second, I identified agency versus passivity by examining which of the characters was the recipient of the other's actions. I also considered what agentic opportunities the child character was narrated as having: for example, were they described as resisting the parent or having no options but to comply with parental authority? Third, I explored whether the characters' positions remained unchanged or changed throughout the story. Lastly, the gender of the characters in each story was considered. After comparing the individual stories and scrutinizing their differences and similarities, five different story types were identified: mediation and compromise stories, surrender stories, persistence stories, solidarity stories, and standoff stories. Story types differed based on the plot structure, positions of the child and parent, and the child's power and agency.

Inspired by sub-studies I and II, **sub-study III** explored how the boys' and girls' descriptions of the child's agency and opportunities for influence differed in their child–parent conflict narratives (Lahtinen et al., being revised). Thus, the whole data set, that is, 104 stories, was included for further analysis. Because the previous sub-studies revealed differences in how the child character expressed their agency in boys' and girls' stories, I decided to examine what these differences were and analyzed each story in detail regarding the child character's agency (Labov, 1976). I focused on the child character's repertoire of strategies for expressing their resistance. The analyses revealed the child's actions ranging from complying and expressing solidarity to resisting, negotiating, and reconciling by apologizing. Compliance was identified as the child acting according to the parent's guidelines and demands, and the child's actions to please the parent were considered expressions of solidarity. The child's defiance toward the parent, including their rules and requests, was identified as resistance and further categorized as indirect (i.e., targeted at the rules of the parent), or direct (i.e., targeted at the parent) (e.g., Kuczynski et al., 2018; Sevón, 2015). Negotiation comprised the child's attempts to express their opposing views constructively to reach a joint agreement by politely asking for or proposing reasons or compromises. The child's apology was identified as their attempt to reconcile. Finally, after comparing individual stories and scrutinizing their differences and similarities, I identified three main story types that were similar for boys and girls: complying stories, resisting stories, and negotiating stories, in which the descriptions of the child character's agency and opportunities for influence varied. When I examined the agency of the child within these story types by gender, I found that only the girls described the child's solidarity, persistent resistance leading to unresolved conflict, and apology. Hence, complying stories were identified as having a subtype (i.e., solidarity stories) and negotiating stories having a subtype (i.e., apologizing stories). Only boys narrated the child's hostile, even aggressive, actions without any remorse.

5   RESULTS

5.1   The child's versatile opportunities for agency in child–parent conflicts: Compliance, resistance, and negotiation

The first research question of the present study examined how 3–6-year-old children describe the child's opportunities for agency in different story types of fictional child–parent conflicts. The research question was answered with the help of three sub-studies. Sub-study I examined the child's participation in child–parent conflicts as revealed in young boys' narratives. The study identified four different story types: ignored participation, parent-directed participation, child-directed participation, and dialogical participation stories. Sub-study II investigated a child's agency and power in child–parent conflicts as narrated by girls and identified five different story types: mediation and compromise, surrender, persistence, solidarity, and standoff stories. Finally, sub-study III utilized both boys' and girls' narratives and contrasted how the child's opportunities for agency and influence were described in them. Three shared main story types emerged: complying, resisting, and negotiating stories. Figure 3 summarizes the child's opportunities for agency in different story types.

Child's agency	Compliance	Resistance	Negotiation
Story types	• Ignored participation stories (*sub-study I*) • Parent-directed participation stories (*sub-study I*) • Surrender stories (*sub-study II*) • Solidarity stories (*sub-study II*) • Complying stories (*sub-study III*)	• Child-directed participation stories (*sub-study I*) • Persistence stories (*sub-study II*) • Standoff stories (*sub-study II*) • Resisting stories (*sub-study III*)	• Dialogical participation stories (*sub-study I*) • Mediation and compromise stories (*sub-study II*) • Negotiating stories (*sub-study III*)
Plot	The child complies with parental authority.	The child resists parental authority.	The child negotiates, and the child and parent find a joint agreement.
Child's influence	The child complicates and delays the course of the conflict and may get insufficient rationale for the parent's actions and decisions.	The child refuses to comply with parental authority and hinders the parent's actions and decisions.	The child has adequate opportunities to influence and contribute to the outcome.

FIGURE 3   The child's opportunities for agency in different story types

Child's agency as compliance. Of the different story types narrated by the children, the most common was the one in which the child was described as complying with the parent's requests and demands (sub-studies I–III) (see Figure 3). In the stories depicting the child's compliance, the parent was generally portrayed as angry and even talking harshly to the child. Similarly, the parent was described as using various ways to get the child to act or behave as requested. The parent, for example, threatened the child verbally with the loss of privileges important to them or used more subtle ways, such as persuasion, to get the child to change their mind and comply. Regardless of how the child expressed their perspectives, the parent was described as ignoring the child's views in decision-making. Thus, the child gave in to parental authority and complied with their requests and demands. The end of the conflict was described as arousing different feelings in the child, varying from anger and sorrow to joy and happiness. The parent, instead, was most commonly described as feeling joy and being in a good mood.

In sub-study I, when examining the realization of the elements of participation, that is, space, voice, audience, and influence (Lundy, 2007), in the boys' stories, it was revealed that the story types of ignored participation and parent-directed participation described the space as pressuring, sometimes even hostile and threatening. The child was unable to express their views freely without parental manipulation and control, and the child was not told why they

were being asked to do something, not do something, or not receive something. The child's views were not fully respected, listened to, or considered, and thus, the conflict ended with the child conforming to the parent's will. Therefore, in the boys' stories describing compliance, all the elements of participation were realized only in a limited way or not at all, and the child's participation was ignored or parent-directed. Of the 43 boys' stories, 24 described the child's compliance.

In sub-study II, when investigating the girls' stories from the perspective of the child's agency and power, in the story types of surrender and solidarity, the parent wielded power over the child's agentic actions, and thus, the child complied with parental authority. The parent was positioned as ignorer and threatener. Sub-study II also found that the child's compliance could either be unwilling or willing. Unwilling compliance was narrated as manifesting in the child as feelings of sadness and sorrow and willing compliance as feelings of joy and a good mood. In total, 23 of 61 girls' stories detailed the child's compliance.

There were similar findings in sub-study III, which drew together the child's agency and opportunities for influence through the narratives of boys and girls. Sub-study III also showed that while the child's agency was quite strongly controlled in the complying stories, the child was able to achieve a sense of agency either by holding onto their anger or by describing the ultimate compliance as their decision. However, in these stories, the child's influence was limited merely to complicating and delaying the course of the conflict or getting insufficient rationale for the parent's actions and decisions.

Based on all three sub-studies, children's stories about compliance highlighted the prevailing power asymmetry in child–parent relations, including children's lesser position in conflicts. Likewise, they suggested that according to young children's understanding, parents tend to constrain and guide the child's behavior quite powerfully in conflicts and demand compliance. Based on the children's stories, such parental practices, however, restrict children's opportunities for agency, including realizing their rights to participate and influence matters important to them. Since a large number of the children's stories (*n=47*) were about the child's compliance, this reveals that child–parent relations based on hierarchical power are not completely democratized, at least from young children's perspectives.

Child's agency as resistance. Another story type concerned the child's resistance and refusal to comply with the parent's requests and demands (sub-studies I–III) (see Figure 3). In the stories of resistance, regardless of how the parent acted, that is, whether the parent was described as angrily demanding the child act or behave in a certain way or whether the parent was narrated as showing initiative to negotiate and compromise with the child, the child disregarded the parent and their views and perspectives. Thus, the child unyieldingly refused to give in to parental authority. The end of the conflict was described as most commonly leading to joy and happiness in the child and mixed feelings in the parent, ranging from anger and sorrow to embarrassment.

In the boys' child-directed participation stories, the realization of the elements of participation described by Lundy (2007) varied greatly (sub-study I). In this story type, the space of the conflict was described as hostile and threatening, and the child's voice was neither facilitated nor given an audience. In a few stories, the space was conducive to the child's voice, and their expressions, including dissent, were supported by offering compromises. In such conflicts, the child's views were also listened to, and the parent tried to contribute to a mutually satisfactory outcome. However, irrespective of the parent's actions and behaviors, the child was always narrated as behaving uncooperatively, such as talking back, acting in a hostile manner, or even engaging in aggressive actions. The child was described as being able to do whatever he wanted. Thus, in the boys' stories describing resistance, whether the child had space, voice, or audience (Lundy, 2007), he was always able to influence both the course and the outcome of the conflict in his favor. Of all the boys' stories, 7 concerned the child's hostile resistance.

In the girls' persistence stories, as revealed in sub-study II, the child was narrated as resisting the parent persistently, either both secretly and in a tactical manner, or openly. Sometimes, the child was also described as showing unsuccessful initiative to negotiate with the parent. In conflicts in which the child was aware of the power differences between them and the parent, the child was narrated as engaging in imaginative and tactical actions, such as acting secretly or whining, through which they were able to get the parent to change their mind. Thereby, the child was positioned as an unyielding tactician and the mother as a mind-changer. There were 12 such stories narrated by girls. In these stories, the child was able to reconstruct the asymmetrical power relations in the generational order and have momentary power over the parent, who was always narrated as the mother. Girls also narrated 7 stories about child–parent conflicts that ended in a standoff. In such conflicts, both the child and parent were described as relentlessly resisting, yet neither one achieved their goal. Thus, both parties were positioned as unyielding. Since neither the child nor the parent had power over the other, they were narrated as equals.

Sub-study III showed that both boys and girls narrated the child using their agentic skills by resisting both in direct and indirect ways in their resisting stories. A child's direct resistance was targeted at the parent and primarily occurred through the child's verbal confrontations, such as yelling, demanding in a hostile manner, and refusing to comply. It could also be composed of actions intended to mock or hurt the parent, for example, throwing a computer at the parent. Indirect resistance, instead, was found to be targeted rather at the rules and norms of the parent and occurred mostly through gestures, such as hiding, ignoring, running away, acting secretly, or doing something forbidden. Either way, however, children's resisting stories described the child's influence as them being able to refuse to comply with parental authority and hindering the parent's actions and decisions.

Children's stories of a child's agency as resistance in all three sub-studies emphasized a child's myriad ways to blur, and even reverse, the traditional

child–parent power hierarchy by engaging in different forms of resistance. Taken together, these stories draw two different kinds of power relations between children and parents: symmetrical and asymmetrical. In symmetrical relations, neither the child nor the parent had power over the other, and in asymmetrical relations, the child had power over the parent. In the latter case, the child had power only momentarily, either because of the child's tactical actions and/or the parent's change of mind. Sometimes, it was because the child was able to participate and influence matters and the outcome of the conflict according to their preferences.

Child's agency as negotiation. Another story type concerned the child's active initiative to negotiate, although the child could also occasionally resist the parent (sub-studies I–III) (see Figure 3). In the stories detailing the child's negotiation, the child's views and perspectives were listened to and considered, and thus, the conflict was always described as ending in a compromise. When the child's original wishes did not influence the outcome of the conflict, the parent justified the reasons for their decisions. Thus, in this type of conflict, the end was narrated as arousing happiness and joy both in the child and parent.

Sub-study I showed that in the boys' dialogical participation stories, the child–parent conflicts were premised on the child's participation. The space of the conflict was never described as hostile or threatening, and the child was able to express their perspectives freely, including their dissent. Even if the child could occasionally resist the parent in an uncooperative way, they were also willing to negotiate. Likewise, the child was encouraged to discuss the situation and offer options, when possible. It was also typical that the parent actively listened to the child and gave a rationale for their decisions. Thus, in situations where the child's original wishes were not met, the parties were still able to find a joint agreement through dialogue. In such conflict stories, the child had a space, voice, and audience, as well as influence, since his views were considered (Lundy, 2007). Altogether 12 stories involved the dialogical participation story type.

In the girls' mediation and compromise stories, the child–parent conflicts included negotiation, accommodative initiatives from both the child and the parent, and shared decision-making (sub-study II). In some stories, however, reaching a mutually agreed solution required convincing parental reasoning, which could be seen as evidence of the child positioning the parent as an authority whose opinion merits consideration. Thereby, both the child and parent were positioned as negotiators and compromisers, and the parent also as a reasoner. Girls narrated 19 mediation and compromise stories. In these stories, the power was shared between the child and parent, and hence, the child's agency and power were not static but open to various negotiations.

Similarly, in both the boys' and girls' stories in sub-study III, the child was described as an active agent in starting a two-way dialogue with the parent. Hence, sub-study III also suggested the process of finding a mutually satisfactory outcome was not always simple and harmonious but sometimes required both parties to actively justify their opinions to ensure compromise. In the children's

negotiating stories, however, the child had adequate opportunities to influence and contribute to a satisfactory outcome.

In summary, even if parental power and authority were noticeably present and resisted by the child in child–parent conflicts, both parties also negotiated and engaged in dialogue. In these stories, children were acknowledged as rights holders and they were seen, heard, and considered in the conflicts as individuals in their own rights. Thereby, the stories about negotiation echoed the current shift from traditional child–parent power relations to more democratic and negotiable relations in which the parents are open to the child's views and perspectives, including those that differ from their own.

5.2 Boys' and girls' diverse descriptions of the child's agency in child–parent conflicts

The second research question of the present study examined how 3–6-year-old boys' and girls' descriptions of the child's opportunities for agency differ in different story types of fictional child–parent conflicts. The research question was answered based on all three sub-studies. Since Labov's (1976) narrative analysis exposed variances in the structure of the children's stories, and sub-studies I and II examined conflicts from slightly different perspectives, the children's descriptions of the child's agency and opportunities for influence were investigated in a detailed manner in sub-study III. While Chapter 5.1 introduced the similarities in the child's agency in the boys' and girls' stories, this chapter focuses on the differences found in the narration between boys and girls, as well as the gender-related narrative styles. Figure 4 summarizes these key differences between boys' and girls' narration and narrative styles.

Boys' narration and narrative style	Girls' narration and narrative style
The characters were almost always male.	The characters could be either male or female.
The story structure was often characterized by complexity, disharmony, and social disorder.	The story structure was often characterized by social order and stable and harmonious relations.
The child character resisted directly in a hostile manner and could act aggressively.	The child character showed solidarity and apologized if they resisted directly in a hostile manner.

FIGURE 4   Key differences between boys' and girls' narration

Hostility and aggression in the boys' narration. In all 43 boys' stories, the child character was depicted as a boy, meaning boys did not narrate any stories about girl characters. Similarly, in all but six of the stories, the parent character was described as a father. Interestingly, when comparing the structure of the children's stories, the boys' stories were found to be more often characterized by

complexity, including disharmony and social disorder. Such features of the boys' storytelling were also visible at the end of the stories, which more often than girls' stories ended with either the child's or the parent's sadness or anger. Additionally, the boys' stories were often slightly shorter than the girls' stories.

Of the different story types narrated by the children, only the boys narrated the child's hostile and aggressive behavior aimed at mocking or even hurting the parent without any remorse (sub-studies I, III). The child's actions could include, for example, viciously yelling and shouting at the parent, soiling the parent's face with toothpaste, or throwing a tablet at the parent. In such stories, the child was described as resisting the parent directly and in a domineering manner. Likewise, the child was narrated as being able to take charge of the conflict and act and influence according to their own preferences regardless of the parent's actions. Thus, the stories about hostility and aggression highlighted the child's uncooperative actions that build neither mutual respect nor dialogue and thus, do not support the child's participation. Such a view of the child's power and opportunities to influence a conflict, however, could also be boy narrators' humor, through which they introduced a storyline in which social norms are tested and the traditional understanding of child–parent power hierarchy is overturned.

Solidarity and apologizing in the girls' narration. In their stories, girls, unlike boys, depicted both boy and girl characters. In story types other than describing a child's persistent resistance, the child could be narrated as either a boy or a girl, and the behavior of the child was presented similarly in either case. Equally, the girls narrated stories about both father and mother characters, although there were clearly more stories with girls and mother characters. In contrast with the boys' stories, the girls' stories were more often characterized by social order, including harmonious and stable relations between the characters. This kind of stability was visible in the ending of the girls' stories, which mostly concluded with the characters feeling joy and being in a good mood. However, girls also narrated stories of disharmonious and unstable child–parent relations, including conflicts that ended in a standoff. Thus, the girls also narrated child–parent conflict stories without a resolution.

The examination of the girls' stories in sub-study II exposed a story type labeled solidarity stories, which were not identified from the boys' stories in sub-study III. Thus, only girls described a child's acts of solidarity as a manifestation of their agency (sub-studies II–III). There were 7 solidarity stories, which were categorized as a sub-type of complying stories (sub-study III). In the solidarity stories, the parent was narrated as becoming angry due to the child's resistance and controlling the child quite powerfully. As a response to the parent's actions, the child was described as wanting to please and make the parent happy. By acting against their own desires and complying with parental authority, the child can be seen as considering complying as more important than continuing to pursue their wishes and desires. Thus, the child prioritized their parent's will and feelings at their own expense and constructed a resolution, in which the parent became happy. Sometimes, the child was narrated as engaging in concrete

actions, such as bringing flowers to or organizing a play for the angry parent to compensate for their inappropriate behavior. Thus, in the solidarity stories, the child was positioned as compliant and solidaristic and the parent as an ignorer (sub-study II). These stories, then, illuminated how the boundary between child and parent became somewhat blurred through the child's actions of solidarity as they took responsibility for their parent's emotional state. From the perspective of power and dependence, opportunities for a shift in the dynamics of agency and power in child–parent conflicts opened when a child adopted, embraced, and implemented acts of solidarity.

In addition to solidarity stories, only girls described the child as expressing their agency by apologizing (sub-study III). In the apologizing stories, the child was first described as resisting the parent, typically in a direct and hostile way, but then they reconciled by apologizing for their behavior. The 5 apologizing stories were categorized as a sub-type of negotiating stories (sub-study III). Hence, these stories described the child as having the capacity to reflect on their behavior and interpret their hostile resisting actions as socially incompetent and inappropriate behavior. The parent was also described as apologizing if they acted in a way that was interpreted as unsuitable. Thus, the apologizing stories emphasized the constructive actions of the child and the parent through which the parties engaged relationally and worked together to find a joint agreement.

6 DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to offer novel insights into how 3–6-year-old Finnish children narrate, make sense of, and understand child–parent conflicts from a generagency perspective. More precisely, the study was interested in how children describe the child's opportunities for agency in child–parent conflicts and how boys' and girls' descriptions differ. Through a narrative approach, the dissertation first examined the child's opportunities to participate through the narratives of boys and then those of girls. Finally, the focus was shifted to the differences in how the boys and girls described the child's agency and opportunities for influence.

The findings of this dissertation have three main contributions: first, it extends our empirical corpus of research on intergenerational conflicts from the perspective of rarely heard young children and reveals the differences in how boys and girls describe a child's opportunities for agency in conflicts. Second, this study makes a theoretical contribution to our understanding of children's agency in child–parent conflicts, including the interrelatedness of the concepts of agency, participation, and influence. Third, it enriches and adds to our knowledge concerning narrative and participatory research methods with young children. Altogether, these findings make interdisciplinary contributions to the field of childhood and family studies, including studies of young children's perspectives.

6.1 Relational insights into the child's agency in child–parent conflicts

The first research question focused on how young children describe a child's opportunities for agency in different story types of fictional child–parent conflicts. It is noteworthy that the analysis of the child's agency in such conflicts manifested as relational. Hence, this study applied the concept of generagency to reveal how structure and agency are activated within the interdependent

relationship between the child and parent and thus, how children negotiate relational agency within the positioning of childhood relative to adulthood (Leonard, 2016; see also Alanen, 2009). When the child's agency was considered in the children's stories of compliance, the child's opportunities to participate were either ignored or realized only on the parent's terms. Thus, these stories showed the relational power asymmetry of child–parent relations (Alanen, 2009). The child's influence was described as limited to complicating or delaying the parent's actions or receiving inadequate justification for the parent's decisions. In the stories detailing compliance, the child's agentic behavior was quite powerfully controlled, and the child was ordered, or at least, expected to comply a finding that is in line with previous studies of child–parent conflicts (Della Porta et al., 2019; Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009). Sometimes, despite the child's resistance, they were narrated as agreeing to their parent's demands willingly, which can be interpreted as an indication of the child's readiness to do things that clash with their own wishes and desires. Hence, although wanting to act as autonomous agents in conflicts, children may also value parental authority and act accordingly (Smetana et al., 2014; Zeyrek & Smetana, 2023).

Children also narrated stories in which the child's agency was linked to their ability to resist and refuse to comply with parental authority persistently regardless of the parent's actions and behavior. As shown in the stories of resistance, the child's influence was realized either as being able to hinder the parent's actions and decisions or influence the outcome of the conflict through their desires. On the one hand, these stories can be interpreted as an indication of the child's struggle, in their marginal position, to defend their autonomy and have a voice and influence (Kuczynski et al., 2018; United Nations, 1989, Articles 12 and 13). On the other hand, they can be seen as bringing out behaviors that do not build reciprocity and dialogue but may promote confrontation and harmful consequences. Hence, stories depicting the child's resistance illuminated the active roles of both the child and parent in contributing to intergenerational conflicts. From the perspective of relational power, these stories showed the child's ability to act despite or as a response to parental power and even dominate and limit the parent's ability to make choices (Allen, 2018, pp. 123–125).

Child–parent conflicts also gave the child opportunities to express their agency by negotiating, defending their views, and reconciling. As illustrated in the stories depicting the child's negotiation, the child was able to participate and join in a dialogue, and the child's influence was realized as receiving adequate justification for the parent's demands and contributing to a mutually satisfactory outcome. Likewise, the child was willing to accommodate, compromise, and engage relationally with their parent (Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997; Kuczynski et al., 2018). However, children's participation in conflicts does not happen automatically; it requires equal and respectful relations in which children and parents work together to create a common understanding. The child must also be free from the threat of parental control and manipulation (see Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007). Findings about the child's agency as negotiation also support Hedegaard's (2018) suggestion that when children are given real opportunities

to participate, child–parent conflicts can have a positive role in their upbringing and learning. Indeed, previous studies about intergenerational conflicts have found that if given the opportunity, children can learn democratic skills, such as social rules and shared decision-making, practice emotional regulation and problem-solving skills, and above all, learn competent ways to express their agency (e.g., Boyer et al., 2015; Della Porta et al., 2019; Killen & Smetana, 2015; Nelson et al., 2014). Thus, by involving children as active agents and equal decision-makers, intergenerational conflicts could be seen as arenas for learning and preparing to participate in democratic citizenship (Horgan et al., 2020; Miklikowska & Hurme, 2011; Turja & Vuorisalo, 2022). Indeed, to adequately understand democracy, children, from an early age, must experience being treated democratically in their everyday lives in different social contexts (Biesta, 2011; Tiwari, 2022; Warming, 2019). Democracy, that is, power sharing, cooperation, and participation (see Allen, 2018, p. 126), should also be a binding principle in child–parent conflicts.

The second research question focused on how young boys' and girls' descriptions of the child's opportunities for agency differ in different story types. Based on all the sub-studies, the gender of the narrator played an important role in the narratives. First, the boys mostly narrated about the child's compliance, meaning they described the conflict ending with the child's compliance more often than the girls. Although binary gender stereotypes associate power, dominance, and privilege with boys (Hourigan, 2021; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023), interestingly, the child was seen as having less influence over the outcome of the conflict in the boys' stories than in the girls' stories (cf. Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990; Sorbring, 2009).

Second, only girls described the child as engaging in acts of solidarity or apologizing for their behavior to avoid endangering their valued relationship with their parent. These girls' stories portray the child character as having the ability to interpret the parent's emotions and identify the cultural discourse of the "nice" and "good", in other words, obedient child. Such an understanding of the child's position in the conflicts, which includes being empathetic and dependent and acting in a caring and kind manner, resembles the narrow stereotypical expectations related to girls (Greene & Nixon, 2020; Kollmayer et al., 2018; Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). Although recognizing the emotions of others and learning to control one's own emotions may be valuable experiences for the child, helping them develop a sense of relational agency and even empower them, acts of solidarity may also blur the traditional understanding of the child's position as "cared for" and the parent as a caregiver. Also, when compensating for resistance by engaging in acts of solidarity, the child may end up preserving a child's lesser and devalued position in intergenerational relations and thus, reinforce the adult order even further. If children often balance their own and their parent's needs and desires and control their own emotions without help from their parent, this process may become a burden and make them prone to vulnerability (Notko & Sevón, 2018). Findings about the child's solidarity parallel with studies that have reported older (8–17 year olds)

children controlling their own emotions in child–parent conflicts to meet the parent's emotional needs or adopting ethics of care in different family situations, for example, to support their mother in single-parent households (Nixon et al., 2012) or when young females care for their younger siblings (Akkan, 2019). To the best of my knowledge, previous studies on child–parent conflicts have not reported young children's solidarity as an expression of the child's agency.

Third, although both the boys and girls narrated the child's resistance, only the boys described the child as having the power to influence the outcome they preferred by resisting directly in a hostile, even aggressive, manner. In the girls' stories, the child's direct resistance led either to the child's solidarity or apology or to unresolved conflict. Also, only the girls narrated the child achieving their goal by engaging in tactical actions without directly challenging the parent or by getting the parent to change their mind (see Corsaro, 2012; Kuczynski et al., 2018). Conversely, only the boys described the child acting as an independent, dominant, and even aggressive agent, with the ability to make autonomous decisions, corresponding to the traits linked to male competence (Baker et al., 2016; Kimmel, 2011). Such a heroic view of the child's agency in the boys' stories could work as a discursive practice to make the most powerless the most powerful within generational order and detach the child from the dependent agent position. Perhaps, the rebellious actions conveyed the carnivalistic features of some boy narrators' humor, in which power was an elemental part (Bahtin, 2002). Thus, for them, humor may serve as a means to generate creativity and fun during the SMPT sessions.

Fourth, regarding gender, it is interesting that in the boys' stories, the child character was always described as a boy. Also, the boys rarely narrated conflicts between a child and mother. Girls narrated stories with both boy and father characters, but they favored more female characters. Similar findings about the influence of the narrator's gender on young children's storytelling have also been found elsewhere (Libby & Ariel, 1988; Änggård, 2005). Since boys, from a young age, have been found to evaluate more harshly than girls for breaking gender norms (Blakemore, 2003; Mulvey & Irvin, 2018; see also Kwan et al., 2024), it may be that the boy narrators in this study did not narrate female characters to avoid depicting and acting out female behaviors, even if only in the story world. Such an interpretation is also in line with the notion boys should not exhibit feminine behaviors (Braun & Davidson, 2017) and face firmer gender boundaries than girls in different contexts (Miller et al., 2024; see also Kwan et al., 2024).

This study exposed the understanding and sense-making of both boys and girls and illuminated what is common but also what is unique in both genders' stories about child–parent conflicts. On the one hand, it showed gender-stereotyped narration and content in the young children's stories through which children maintained the binary ideas of gender differences. Children's narration, then, can be seen as constructing and reifying children's gendered ways of making meanings and being in the world and thus, as expressions of "boyhood" and "girlhood" (Fivush & Grysman, 2022; Heikkilä, 2021). On the other hand, children's stories also challenged the binary and inflexible understanding of

gender differences as both boys and girls narrated stories that transcended and dissolved the binary division and the associated traditional and narrow stereotypical gender role expectations. Considering these findings, the participating children in the present study can be seen as perpetuating the rigid and inflexible notions of gender differences through storytelling, but also to negotiate and transcend gender categories. Finally, from a social constructionist perspective, this study illuminated how both boys and girls actively constructed social reality, including gender, in interactions through their narration. Thus, gender differences should be regarded as an outcome of language, interaction, and social processes instead of qualities that boys and girls simply possess (Lorber, 2008; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In families, regardless of gender, children's opportunities for agency are realized within and across asymmetrical relations between children and parents (Alanen, 2009, 2018; Leonard, 2016). In the stories of compliance, the parent was narrated as wielding power over the child (Alderson & Yoshida, 2016, p. 75; Allen, 2018), and thus, the child's right to express their views freely and influence matters (United Nations, 1989) was restricted. In these stories, even the practices carried out in the name of protecting and guiding the child were described as controlling and worked as a means to get the child to confirm generational structures (Millei, 2012; Moran-Ellis & Sünker, 2013). These stories, then, can be seen as illustrating the barriers children face in exercising their agency in intergenerational conflicts. Such barriers are related to the idea of children as passive recipients of parental power, whose resisting actions are problematic and require suppression (Kuczynski et al., 2018). Alternatively, they can be seen as related to the idea of young children lacking the competence to recognize their own best interests, meaning they need protection and care (see Alderson, 2010; Moran-Ellis, 2013). Overall, these findings echo those of previous studies on the difficulties young children in particular may face in conflicts (Della Porta et al., 2019; Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009). Despite the prevailing egalitarian mindset and strong emphasis on promoting children's rights in Finnish families (Mikkonen et al., 2023), most of the children's stories highlighted parental power and children's constrained opportunities for agency. Thus, these findings suggest child–parent relations have not entirely evolved from hierarchical relations based on authoritarianism to democratic and negotiable.

Children also narrated stories about negotiation, in which parental authority, including rules and norms, could be upheld to protect and care for the child while respecting the child's perspectives (see United Nations, 1989). The child–parent conflicts were described as occurring in democratic relations, based on equality, reciprocity, and mutual accommodation (Kuczynski et al., 2018; Sevón, 2015), and shed light on the child's and parent's capacity to participate and act equally for a shared end (Alderson & Yoshida, 2016, p. 75; Allen, 2018, pp. 126–129). These children's stories resonate with studies suggesting that engaging in two-way dialogue, being listened to, and understanding the decision-making process without being pressured or manipulated are among the

most important features in supporting children's sense of having real opportunities for agency (Horgan et al., 2020; Lundy, 2007, 2018).

However, children also narrated stories in which the child was able to influence the conflict outcome by following their own desires and thus, even overturn the traditional generational order. As revealed in the stories of resistance, the child was able to limit the possibilities available to the parent and even exert power over the parent, at least momentarily (Allen, 2018, pp. 123–125). Children's right to express their views and have them considered, however, does not grant children the right to make autonomous decisions in conflicts, especially if such decisions harm or wholly overlook the other party's views (Hart, 1992, 2008; Lundy, 2007). Thus, such stories raise an important question: To what extent should young children be seen as moral agents having responsibilities in conflicts (see Tisdall & Punch, 2012)? Stories depicting the child's resistance, then, revealed the tension in positioning children merely as competent agents and seeing agency only as a positive feature of children's activity in the generational order (Greene & Nixon, 2020). Although children should have freedom of voice and influence, their agentic behavior must sometimes be controlled and restricted to protect them from harming themselves or others. Just as adults' lives are framed by different laws and societal and social rules, children also need to learn the necessary cultural values and social norms of their society (Kuczynski, 2003). The key, then, is whether children's opportunities for agency in families are restricted in a way that appropriately considers children as active agents with the right to a voice and influence (see United Nations, 1989). At its core, this is an ethical matter and concerns whether parents see children as equals within the generational order or recipients of parental authority and control. Certainly, young children's opportunities for agency in families derive from the asymmetrical relations between the child and parent and thus, need to be viewed as a relational phenomenon concurrently occurring within and across intergenerational relations (Leonard, 2016).

6.2 Theoretical synthesis of the concepts of agency, participation, and influence in child–parent conflicts

This study revealed the ambiguities in employing the theoretical concepts of agency, participation, and influence in practice and complex realities, such as in child–parent conflicts (see Tisdall & Punch, 2012). First, the concept of agency tends to lack clarity and explicit definition (Greene & Nixon, 2020) and is often equated with action or resistance, or the ability to bring about change (Abebe, 2019; Giddens, 1984; James, 2009). Also, its relationship to the concepts of participation and influence is somewhat vague, and these concepts have sometimes been used interchangeably to explain each other (Greene & Nixon, 2020; Punch, 2020). The children's stories, however, showed that the child's expressions of agency in child–parent conflicts vary greatly, meaning agency cannot be seen as

straightforward action or resistance. Nor can it be viewed as manifesting only when a child can change the outcome of the conflict. Further, the findings of this study reveal that although the concepts of agency, participation, and influence are closely connected, they can be seen as analytically separate (see Figure 5).
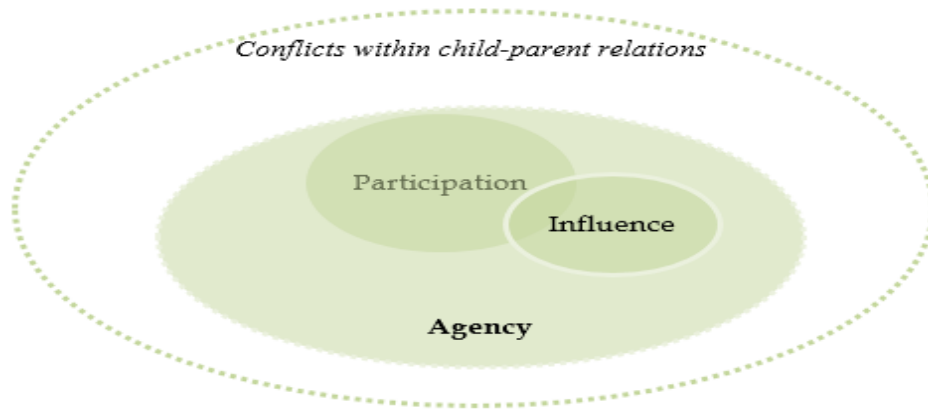

FIGURE 5   The interrelatedness of agency, participation, and influence

In this study, agency is perceived broadly as encompassing both the child's motivational and behavioral aspects of agency, as well as the child's capacity for sense-making (Kuczynski, 2003; see also De Mol & Kuczynski, 2018; Greene & Nixon, 2020). The child's agency is viewed as a multidimensional and tension-filled phenomenon that is constructed, negotiated, and renegotiated within the interactions in child–parent conflicts (see Bjerke, 2011; Horgan et al., 2020; Greene & Nixon, 2020; Kuczynski et al., 2018; Sevón, 2015). Children's agency is also seen as strongly embedded in the socio-cultural context of intergenerational relations (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 2018; Kumpulainen et al., 2014).

Participation, in turn, is used to refer to children's opportunities to express their views freely, as well as join in dialogue and shared decision-making (Horgan et al., 2020; Lundy, 2007; United Nations, 1989), in other words, being involved in social practices as equals (Warming, 2019). Such opportunities were described in the children's stories about negotiation, in which all the elements prerequisite for meaningful participation, namely space, voice, audience, and influence (Lundy, 2007), were realized, and child–parent conflicts were premised on the child's participation. Thus, the realization of the child's participation always comprises the realization of the child's influence (Hart, 1992, 2008; Lundy, 2007). However, since through participation, children can understand and learn how their views and the views of others contribute to shaping the outcome, participation extends beyond mere influence and can also be connected to learning (Lundy, 2007; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, para.3).

Finally, influence means that children's views and perspectives are considered and thus, they have an impact on the outcome (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007). In child–parent conflicts, the child's influence can vary from getting adequate justifications for the decisions taken to achieving their objective. Hence, the child can have influence although they do not achieve their original goal and desired outcome. However, it is important to note that a child's influence does not

automatically mean the realization of the child's participation. As shown in the stories describing the child's resistance, the child was able to influence the outcome according to their preferences although neither dialogue nor shared decision-making arose between the child and parent, and thus, the child's participation was not realized.

The findings of this study strengthen the notion of participation and influence as manifestations of agency (Bjerke, 2011; Horgan et al., 2020; Sirkko et al., 2019). When contemplating the interrelatedness of these concepts in child–parent conflicts, children are considered as being able to sense themselves as agents even when they do not have opportunities to participate or influence the outcome according to their wishes and desires. As seen in the stories depicting the child's compliance, the child can perceive themselves as agentic when complying by holding onto their feelings of anger even after the conflict (Kuczynski et al., 2018; Parkin & Kuczynski, 2012), by describing compliance as the child's change of mind and decision (Corsaro, 2012; Kuczynski, 2003), or by engaging in actions of solidarity to make the parent happy and compensate for their behavior (see Nixon et al., 2012; Notko & Sevón, 2018). Agency can also be manifested as construction and creativity in interpretation while complying (Corsaro, 2012; De Mol et al., 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Moran-Ellis, 2013). Similarly, agentic capabilities can also be used constructively by negotiating and reconciling. So, it is also crucial to consider children's engagement with their life worlds and acknowledge their more subtle ways of expressing agency (see Greene & Nixon, 2020; Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016; Moran-Ellis, 2013; Valentine, 2011). Examining a child's opportunities for agency through different concepts, namely participation and influence, produces a more multidimensional and nuanced picture of children's agency in child–parent conflicts and supports the importance of moving away from simplifying the concept of children's agency.

6.3 Storytelling as a sensitive method to value young children's meaning-making processes

This study adds much-needed knowledge to our understanding of age and development-appropriate methods used with young children (Sevón et al., 2023), whose participation is the most challenging to support in research (Murray, 2019). Through the creative and playful SMPT method (Koivula et al., 2020; Turja & Laakso, 2011), the present study shed light on the value of a method sensitive to young children's meaning-making processes that facilitates their participation in research. Based on the findings of this study, narratives generated with the SMPT method have a lot of untapped scientific potential.

This study showed the SMPT method considers the inherent ways in which young children express themselves and communicate their views and perspectives, that is, by telling stories and playing (Backman-Nord et al., 2023; Moran et al., 2021a; Puroila et al., 2012a). Play is the world most familiar to young

children (Rollins, 2024, p. 99). Although the SMPT method could be considered linguistically oriented in the sense that it was originally designed to trigger children to narrate verbally (Turja & Laakso, 2011), as in this study, the method also offers children opportunities to tell their stories and make sense of their life-worlds nonverbally, for example, by using signing (Engel, 2005; Rollins, 2024, p. 105). Thus, SMPT as a storytelling-based method can be seen as a democratic way to support the participation of all children, regardless of their abilities or will to communicate with words. To respect the embodied and holistic nature of young children's expressions, the data generated with the SMPT method could also be examined by considering the multimodality of the children's narratives, such as body language and silence, and focusing on the dynamic processes of producing the narratives (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Puroila et al., 2012b).

Also, the SMPT method uses play, including toy props and a hand puppet, which has been found to have many benefits as a tool in research and institutional contexts (Colliver & Veraksa, 2019; Kröger & Nupponen, 2019; Patton & Winter, 2023). For example, both the toy props used in playing and puppets have been suggested to facilitate children's expressions and thus, increase their verbal and behavioral communication (Cayne et al., 2021; Nigro & Wolpow, 2004; Rollins, 2024, p. 99). Also in the present study, using such equipment contributed to creating a positive and fun atmosphere, lowered anxiety, and encouraged children to join in a dialogue. Although the power imbalance could never be entirely addressed, the use of different playful approaches shifted the power balance between the child participant and me, supported the child's engagement in research, and thus, enhanced young children's participation.

The present study corrects two misconceptions associated with narrative research with young children (Puroila et al., 2012a). The first is that young children are not capable of producing narratives with a complete story structure, and the second is that incomplete narratives are not scientifically interesting. As this study showed, most of the children's stories had a beginning, middle, and end (Labov, 1976). The stories that did not have a perfect story structure still yielded important scientific information about child–parent conflicts from young children's perspectives. In this regard, it is important to note that the children's stories were produced in collaboration with the researcher and thus, they can be seen as jointly created (Heller, 2019; Tisdall, 2017). Indeed, children's narratives offer potential meeting places for them and the researcher to co-construct knowledge (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Puroila et al., 2012a).

This study showed the SMPT method derives rather from the child world than the adult world, making it a valuable tool for listening to the voices of young children. In line with previous studies (Koivula et al., 2019; Sevón, 2015; Sevón et al., 2023), this study suggests the SMPT method fulfills the promise to enhance young children's participation and empower them. Children's storytelling could also be used in many different settings, such as ECEC, schools, and healthcare, or in other contexts in which adults need to get insights into the worlds of young children. Its use in the family could also have several benefits for both the child and parent by encouraging children to actively share their views, improve their

social-emotional competence, and develop strategies to find socially sustainable solutions to challenging situations. Parents could learn to actively listen to children and become more responsive to their expressions, thereby helping get closer to their children's life worlds. So, this method could also enhance child–parent interactions and increase intergenerational reciprocity.

6.4 Ethical considerations and the researcher's positioning

This research was conducted in an ethically responsible manner by following the ethical guidance of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2019) regarding research with human participants in the human sciences. Attention was paid to the guidelines regarding child participants, which were followed precisely at each stage of the research process. Due to the sensitive topic of the present study and the involvement of young children, an ethical review was requested from the Human Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Jyväskylä. However, as TENK's criteria were not met (for example, separate consent was obtained from guardians and children), the ethical review was found not to be required. Based on the feedback received, however, the ethical aspects of the research were reconsidered critically prior to data collection.

Before starting the empirical work, permission to conduct the research was sought from the municipal early childhood education authority and the managers of the three ECEC centers, who expressed their willingness to participate in the recruitment of children and organize the necessary facilities for data collection in their ECEC centers. After also informing the staff of the centers, they were asked to distribute research information sheets, including the consent form, background information sheet, and privacy notice, to the guardians of 4–7-year-olds from different backgrounds (e.g., family situations, gender, and age) (see Appendixes 6, 7, 8, and 9). Because the researcher only speaks and understands Finnish and English, the child had to be able to communicate verbally, at least in a rudimentary way, in these languages. Thus, children who spoke other languages could not be included. Lack of financial resources precluded the use of interpretation services. The researcher, however, was not informed to whom the invitations were distributed.

The invitations informed guardians 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 (TENK, 2019). It was also made clear that researchers have a statutory obligation to report to social and health authorities if any serious suspicions of violence or ill-treatment of children should arise during the study (see Appendix 9). Guardians were given one to two weeks to familiarize themselves with the research information sheet, discuss the research with their child, fill out the background information sheet, and sign the consent form. Although parents were invited to meet the researcher in their children's ECEC centers before giving consent, only a few used the opportunity. From ECEC center A, 11 out of 21 invited children

were permitted to participate in the study, from which 10 children wanted to participate. From ECEC center B, 10 out of 30 invited children got permission to participate with 8 eventually participating. From ECEC center C, 27 participated out of 45 invited children. Since adults can limit or control the researchers' access to child participants, questions related to gatekeeping became crucial in this study (Water, 2024). The access to the children was dependent on both the staff of ECEC centers and parents. So, one could ask whether they acted as gatekeepers for the voices of children and whether they enabled the voices of some children while suppressing those of others (Kiili et al., 2024). Thus, the researcher does not know whether all parents who received the research invitation informed their children about the study and whether all children had the chance to consider participation.

Research with children relies on the same ethical principles that guide research in general, such as issues related to trust, avoiding causing unnecessary harm, and ensuring voluntary participation (Rutanen & Vehkalahti, 2019a). Yet, some special ethical questions are essential in research with young children due to the prevailing child–adult power hierarchy, such as the position of the child as a research subject and their opportunities for genuine participation (Kiili et al., 2024). Following the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989), I respected the children's autonomy and participation at all stages of the research process while also recognizing their rights to protection (Alderson & Morrow, 2020; Coyne & Carter, 2024; Oates, 2019). Although concepts such as confidentiality are complex and can be difficult for young children to fully understand (Moore et al., 2018), research suggests that even very young children, starting from the age of 3–4, can make an informed decision about their participation (see Arnott et al., 2020; O'Farrelly & Tatlow-Golden, 2022). To prevent possible discomfort with the use of audio and video recorders, the children were offered an opportunity to test them before the session. There are also issues surrounding where research with young children should occur. Although the home is typically considered a safe and secure place for conducting research, it poses challenges related to ethical considerations (Saron & Carter, 2024). For example, Coad and colleagues (2015) noted the complex power relations within the family and between both family and the researcher and thus, suggested considering a more neutral setting that may better promote children's participation and reflect values of empowerment. In this study, the SMPT sessions were conducted in the children's ECEC centers.

In line with the narrative approach (Riessman, 2008; Spector-Mersel, 2010), I recognized my subjective role as a researcher both in generating the data and interpreting the narratives. Despite my efforts to assume as objective a position as possible, it was inevitably influenced by factors such as my age, gender, education, and life experiences (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018). The effect of my gender was evident in the SMPT sessions when some children, despite narrating a story about a child and father, asked me to act out a mother character because I was female. Moreover, I feel that being a mother myself, helped me a lot to communicate with the children and assume a very natural position during the data generation. Although I facilitated the child's narration during the SMPT

sessions without leading it in any specific direction, my questions inevitably influenced the story construction. Similarly, even if I tried my best to listen to the different voices of all the children and valued their meaning-making processes, I decided what to ask and when, and in such situations, something else was inevitably left unasked. It is also crucial to note that I inevitably developed in my role. This was particularly evident with accumulated experience as I gradually no longer felt the need to fill quiet moments and learned to give the child more space without fearing silence would cause distress. I also learned what a child's real active and intensive listening meant. This became concrete in the data analysis when I noticed that especially in the early sessions, I missed some important clues from the child's narration, about which it would have been worthwhile to ask more. Hence, although rich and multidimensional, one could argue that the data was incomplete and limited (Riessman, 2008).

Working hard to become familiar with research ethics with children before conducting the research (Atkinson, 2019; Rutanen & Vehkalahti, 2019b) helped me acknowledge many pitfalls before generating the data. For example, being aware of stereotypical expectations regarding boys and girls and that such conventions might also influence my behavior, I facilitated the children's narration by utilizing similar types of questions. Nevertheless, since a few boys in particular needed more facilitation in telling a story, I was more vocal in such sessions. Then, my role as co-producer was emphasized and may have led, for example, to inadvertently focus on some aspects over others. However, all the children's narratives should be seen as being created with me and thus, co-constructed (Heller, 2019). Also, children's narratives are situational, meaning they ought to be understood within a larger sociocultural context (Moran et al., 2021a; Riessman, 2008). Whether rooted in real-life events or fictional, children's stories should not be considered as directly representing their own experiences. Instead, they offer novel insights into young children's worlds and how boys and girls understand and make sense of the child's opportunities for agency in child–parent conflicts.

All the information collected was handled and stored according to the data management plan. The data was pseudonymized and all the identifiers were removed to prevent the recognition of individual participants. The concrete material, that is, parental consent, background information forms, and children's playful contracts, were kept in a locked room, and the research data, including the video and audio recorded data and the transcriptions, were stored in a personal, password-protected drive by the University of Jyväskylä. A copy of the research data was made on an encrypted USB drive, which was also password protected. Thus, no third party was able to gain access to any material or data.

6.5   Evaluation of the study

This study sought novel insights from a generagency perspective on how young children made sense of conflicts between children and parents. Thus, a narrative

approach was a natural choice when examining sensitive topics and aiming to listen to the voices of young children (Moran et al., 2021a). By respecting the children as active agents and their inherent communication channels (i.e., storytelling and playing), the narrative and child-centered SMPT method enabled access to the life worlds of young children (Koivula et al., 2020). The data generated for this study was multidimensional and rich and comprised narratives from boys (*n=19*) and girls (*n=26*). Of the total number of stories (104 stories), 43 were from boys and 61 from girls, and thus, the majority were girls' stories. However, the number of stories narrated by each boy and each girl was almost the same, that is, slightly over two stories. Although the boys' stories were typically somewhat shorter than the girls', and maybe partly for that reason, slightly less elaborate (Marjanovič-Umek et al., 2012), the data enabled the identification of differences between the boys' and girls' stories. The fact that girls seem to have an advantage over boys in language development and verbal skills may have influenced these differences (Eriksson et al., 2012; Gardner-Neblett & Sideris, 2018; Hossain et al., 2024).

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations. The SMPT session pictures limited the conflicts to seven different situations, so the children were not completely free to decide which conflicts they would narrate. Also, boys only narrated stories about boy characters, and only a few boys' stories concerned mother characters. Perhaps the baldness of the characters, despite being drawn wearing clothes in non-stereotypical gendered colors (Hourigan, 2021), guided the boys, contrary to the girls, to imagine them as male characters. According to some of the boys, the characters in the pictures resembled a son and father. Maybe for boys, settling into a different gender position, even if in the story world, can be challenging, reflecting firm rules of gender conformity adopted by boys (Koenig, 2018). Thus, the boys' stories described the child's opportunities for agency mainly in boy–father conflicts. To get a more comprehensive picture of intergenerational conflicts, boys' stories of boy–mother conflicts should also be examined. Girls, instead, had both girl and boy characters and mother and father characters, yet girls narrated almost twice as many stories about female characters as male characters. Furthermore, it is important to note that there are many other areas of family life where children may strive to be agentic, such as bringing friends home to play or participating in planning meals or holidays. Future studies, thus, should focus on how children's opportunities for agency, participation, and influence are realized in these sites of child–parent interaction.

Since SMPT is a narrative-based method, it may have excluded potential participants who could not communicate verbally or with whom there was no common language. In this regard, the present study mostly represents the voices of Finnish children with quite homogenous backgrounds: the children were mostly from nuclear families, at least one of the child's guardians had tertiary education, and none of the children had an immigrant background. However, previous studies across cultures have, for example, found a link between social class and parenting and parental practices — parents in upper-middle-class families have fewer authoritarian attitudes than working-class parents and poor

parents — which also influences children's opportunities for agency in families (Burke & Kuczynski, 2018; Lansford et al., 2021; Lareau, 2011). Thus, the narratives of young children with more variety in their socioeconomic status and family forms, from ethnic and/or immigrant minority backgrounds, and with special needs should be examined.

Although the participating children were told that all kinds of stories were important and welcome, the power imbalance between the child and me may have influenced the child's narration. As Palaiologou (2017) stated, children might tend to say what they assume the adult researcher wants to hear. So, it is important to ask whether my position as an adult researcher influenced, for example, the creation of a large number of stories of the child's compliance. However, since there was variety in the children's stories, it could be assumed that the children narrated stories based on their desires, motives, and interests, rather than supplying the "right answers." In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the children participated in this study voluntarily. Additionally, one should question what influence the use of audio and video recorders had on the children's narration and play. Although the use of recorders may not be neutral in the sense that some children might be uncomfortable in their presence (Gibson et al., 2024, p. 126), most of the participating children explained they were familiar at least with the videorecorders and those who wanted to could test them. I felt the children were relaxed with the recorders and no one either verbally refused to use them or showed discomfort through body language.

In terms of the trustworthiness of this study, the aspects presented by Lincoln and Guba (1980), *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability*, are valuable criteria for evaluation. *Credibility* refers to how compatible the findings are with the reality they represent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; see also Shenton, 2004). In this study, credibility was guaranteed by both choosing a research methodology suitable for examining young children's voices, that is, narrativity, and by becoming familiar with the topic both theoretically and empirically. Also, as I collected and transcribed all the data alone, this allowed me to form a holistic picture of the large and multidimensional dataset. In the analysis, all the children's narratives were first subjected to structural analysis (Labov, 1976), and thus, I went through each story in depth and systematically. Analyzing the boys' and girls' stories separately first in different sub-studies helped me form a comprehensive picture of the separate findings. Then, analyzing all the stories together and comparing them helped me gain insights into gender differences. I also had several discussions about my interpretations with my supervisors. Thus, "triangulating analysts" (Patton, 2015, p. 665; see also Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), in other words, having more than one researcher interpreting the data, enhanced the credibility of the study. The credibility of the findings was also enriched by exposing different story types and identifying each story as belonging to a specific type. To ensure the reader can comprehend and agree with the interpretations made in this study, I have described the analysis processes accurately, including their rationale (see Chapter 4.5). Additionally, I used direct extracts from the data when reporting the findings to illustrate the

co-produced nature of the stories (Heller, 2019; Puroila et al., 2012) and make the participants' multi-voicedness as visible as possible. Hence, the findings aim to reveal the young children's realities and bring out their common features, as well as uniqueness and nuances. The reader, however, should remember interpretations are always more or less subjective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 250–251).

Transferability, the second criterion of trustworthiness, refers to the findings as having applicability in other contexts as well (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since this study mostly represents the voices of quite a homogenous group of young Finnish children, the findings are not transferrable to all young children and to those living in other socio-cultural contexts. Also, it is important to be cautious about how the gendering of the adult might have influenced the boys' stories. The transferability of the study, however, has been enhanced by evaluating the findings of each sub-study in terms of previous studies concerning the child's agency and participation in families (e.g., Bjerke, 2011; Horgan et al., 2020) and child–parent conflicts (e.g., Della Porta, 2022; Hedegaard, 2018). Although young children's views on intergenerational conflicts have only rarely been heard, let alone approached narratively from a gendered perspective, the few previous studies (Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009) have also reported comparable findings concerning the child's opportunities for agency. Transferability is also confirmed by the fact that children from three different ECEC centers described similar stories and children of certain ages did not narrate certain types of stories.

To meet the criterion of *dependability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher should aim to offer the reader adequate information and evidence of the research process. In the present study, I described the research process thoroughly, including giving sufficient detail about the context of the fieldwork, so that the reader can evaluate the credibility of the findings and repeat the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Shenton, 2004; see also Stahl & King, 2020). In this regard, I have provided as detailed, comprehensive, and understandable a description as possible of the analysis procedure in each sub-study. Since I am a native Finnish speaker, but all the reports were written in English, their language proofreading and translations have been checked for accuracy by a native English-speaking academic. Considering the extensive amount of research data (589 pages of transcribed text), writing summaries of each child's story before the actual analysis helped greatly improve my understanding of the material in its entirety and recognize its richness (see Labov, 1976). Also, the dependability of this study was improved by having my supervisors and reviewers critique the sub-studies and dissertation (see Patton, 2015; Stahl & King, 2020).

Finally, *confirmability* means the research and its findings should represent reality as much as possible (Lincoln & Cuba, 1984; Stahl & King, 2020). The researcher must ensure the analysis and interpretations are also understandable to others. During the research process, I tried to be faithful to my data and actively and critically reflect on my positioning. I also acknowledged that many factors, such as my personal experiences, impacted data generation as well as the related interpretations and conclusions (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018). Thus,

I had several critical discussions with my supervisors during the research process, especially when interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions. Such collaboration strengthened the trustworthiness of this study.

6.6   Practical implications and future directions

The study findings have practical implications for parents and more broadly for adults working with young children, for example, in ECEC. Based on the children's stories, a child's opportunities for agency in intergenerational conflicts are largely structured and constrained by adult authority, including their rules and norms. In the children's stories, parents tended to exert their superior authority in conflicts to obtain compliance. Therefore, this study encourages adults to critically reflect on both how they encounter young children in intergenerational relations and their parental practices of hindering, sometimes unintentionally, children's opportunities for agency in child–parent conflicts.

This study also suggests parents listen actively and sensitively to children's different ways of expressing their views and see children's resistance through the agentic lens as a development of autonomy rather than something that needs to be suppressed, as suggested by Kuczynski and colleagues (2018). Yet, children's participation and influence should not be confused with allowing them to do whatever they want or engage in actions that may lead to negative outcomes, such as engaging in uncontrolled forms of resistance (see Van Petegem et al., 2015). By engaging relationally and joining in a dialogue, children can practice socially competent ways to express their agency, learn to compromise and accommodate, and hence, resolve conflicts in a mutually satisfactory way. Such skills are also tremendously important in children's other social relations and future participation in society. Seeing conflicts as spaces for learning would support children's behavior and development and increase their overall well-being. Hence, conflicts could play a positive role in upbringing (Hedegaard, 2018).

Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of parents being aware of potential gender differences in how boys and girls may express their agency in child–parent conflicts. Based on the children's stories, children may engage in actions that reproduce traditional stereotypical assumptions about appropriate behavior for boys and girls while similarly leading to negative outcomes. For example, if boys engage merely in hostile and aggressive actions and express their agency by over-emphasizing their independence, they may miss out on learning important socio-emotional skills, such as justice, negotiation, and shared decision-making (see Levant & Wong, 2017). Likewise, if girls are only guided to please their parents, they learn to suppress and ignore their own needs, desires, and emotions and reproduce the conventional and narrow idea of girls as "kind" and "obedient" (see Greene & Nixon, 2020). Such behavior may become a burden to the child and even lead to the adoption of inappropriate roles by the child and parent within intergenerational conflicts. In any case, the primary responsibility for reconciliation always lies with the parent, regardless of the child's gender.

Although this narrative study showed how young boys and girls make sense of child–parent conflicts and the child's opportunities for agency, there are still many important perspectives on this phenomenon for future studies. To obtain a more comprehensive picture of child–parent conflicts, it would be important to listen to narratives from a more diverse group of children, particularly those at risk of marginalization. As the development of child–parent power relations depends on different cultural contexts (Kuczynski et al., 2018), young children's narratives in non-Western societies are also worth exploring. Equally, the kinds of parenting styles that are reflected in children's stories would be interesting to examine in the future. For example, the parental practices described in the stories of compliance closely resemble those found in authoritarian parenting styles while those described in the stories of negotiation parallel authoritative parenting styles (Mikkonen et al., 2023). Since children occupy a subordinate position to adults (Leonard, 2016), future research could examine children's views about child-adult conflicts that arise in ECEC centers and school contexts. In these spaces, children's lives are quite powerfully structured by institutional order, including adult control, and thus, it would be important to scrutinize how children make sense of children's opportunities for agency offered by child–adult conflicts in more formal structures. Moreover, as childhood and materiality are often intertwined in multiple ways (Alasuutari et al., 2021; Heikkilä, 2016), this study suggests examining children's agency in intergenerational conflicts from the perspective of materiality and embodiment. By locating children's agency within interdependent and complex child–parent relations and in relation to material resources, research on intergenerational conflicts could reveal novel perspectives on young children's lives.

This dissertation showed the variety in how young children describe and make sense of the child's opportunities for agency in child–parent conflicts. Although children's stories pointed out the child's lesser position within the generational order, they also revealed the child's myriad ways of expressing their agency and blurring, even reversing, the traditional understanding of child–parent power relations (see Alanen, 2009; Leonard, 2016). Of particular interest was how children, while challenging the binary and inflexible understanding of gender differences, also adhered to the established cultural scripts for boys and girls, and hence, already from such a young age, they perpetuated and reproduced the narrow stereotypical expectations of behaviors appropriate for boys and girls (see Baker et al., 2016; Skočajić et al., 2020). To contribute to more egalitarian gender roles within the generational order, adults should be aware of gender role attitudes and their reflection in upbringing. Hence, it is important to be mindful that each social situation, including child–parent conflicts, offers adult opportunities to either strengthen or challenge existing gender ideologies. Understanding young boys' and girls' life worlds and identifying the barriers that hinder their opportunities for agency in child–parent conflicts could foster the realization of rights (United Nations, 1989) and gender equality for all children.

YHTEENVETO

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan pienten lasten kertomuksia lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksista kuvitteellisissa lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden konflikteissa. Vanhemmuudesta on tullut länsimaissa, mukaan lukien Suomessa, entistä lapsikeskeisempää ja lapsi–vanhempisuhteet ovat muuttuneet demokraattisemmiksi ja neuvoteltavammaksi (Chen ym., 2019; Laurén & Malinen, 2021). Tällaista sukupolvien välisten suhteiden tasa-arvoistumista on vauhdittanut Yhdistyneiden Kansakuntien (YK) lapsen oikeuksien sopimus (1989; artiklat 12 ja 13), jonka mukaan jokaisella lapsella, joka kykenee muodostamaan omat mielipiteensä, on oikeus vapaasti ilmaista näkemyksensä kaikissa häntä koskevissa asioissa ja saada ne huomioon otetuiksi. Nykypäivän perheissä lapsilla onkin enemmän mahdollisuuksia ilmaista mielipiteitään, vaikuttaa ja osallistua päätöksentekoon kuin aikaisemmin (Bjerke, 2011; Horgan ym., 2020). Hiljattain lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden muutokset ovat kuitenkin herättäneet huolipuheita niin kansallisesti kuin kansainvälisesti vanhemman vähentyneestä vallasta, lasten muuttumisesta tottelevista huonokäytöksisiksi, ja jopa koko vanhemmuuden problematisoitumisesta (ks. esim. Sihvonen 2020; Zheng ym., 2022).

Lasten toimijuuden mahdollisuudet perheissä riippuvat lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden valtahierarkiasta eli sukupolvijärjestyksestä (Alanen, 2009). Siten toimijuutta tarkastellaan tässä tutkimuksessa relationaalisena ilmiönä (Alanen, 2018). Sukupolvien välisten suhteiden tasa-arvoistumisesta huolimatta valtadynamiikka säilyy aina epäsymmetrisenä (Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016) ja ilmenee erityisesti lasten ja vanhempien eriävien näkemysten aiheuttamissa konflikteissa (Sevón, 2015). Kuten aiemmat tutkimukset ovat havainneet (Della Porta ym., 2019; Rechhia ym., 2010), länsimaiset vanhemmat vaativat lapsilta usein myöntymistä vanhempien tahtoon ja hallitsevat melko voimakkaasti lasten käyttäytymistä ja konfliktin lopputulosta. Vanhempien on myös huomattu tulkitsevan lapsen vastustuksen helposti huonoksi käytökseksi, joka tulisi tukahduttaa (Kuczynski ym., 2018). Samanlaisia tuloksia on saatu myös niissä harvoissa pohjoismaisissa tutkimuksissa, joissa on tarkasteltu lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden konflikteja pienten lasten näkökulmasta (Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009). Vaikka lasten oikeudet ovat tärkeitä kaikissa tilanteissa, ne vaarantuvat erityisesti sukupolvien välisissä konflikteissa.

Lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden konflikteja on tarkasteltu aikaisemmin pääasiassa joko havainnointitutkimuksin, vanhempien näkökulmista tai on keskitytty siihen, miten vanhemmat vaikuttavat lapsen kasvuun ja kehitykseen (Burke & Kuczynski, 2018; Della Porta ym., 2022; Driscoll & Pianta, 2011). Lisäksi aiemmin on oletettu, että pienten lasten näkemyksiä on vaikea tutkia tai että lapset ovat kykenemättömiä tuottamaan tutkimuksen kannalta luotettavia ja merkityksellisiä kertomuksia (ks. esim. DeCosta ym., 2023; Puroila ym., 2012a). Tällaiset aikuiskeskeiset lähestymistavat asettavat kuitenkin vanhemmat aktiivisiksi ja kyvykkäiksi toimijoiksi ja lapset vanhemman auktoriteetin ja vallan kohteiksi. Vaikka tiedämme, että lasten elämä on myös sukupuolittunutta (Alanen, 2009, 2018; Leonard, 2016; Punch, 2020), ja että lapset saattavat ilmaista toimijuuttaan

jo hyvin pienenä tavalla, joka uusintaa kapeita stereotyyppisiä poikiin ja tyttöihin liittyviä käsityksiä (Greene & Nixon, 2020), on lasten näkemyksiä konflikteista harvoin tarkasteltu sukupuolen näkökulmasta (Sevón, 2015; cf. Sorbring, 2009). Nämä huomiot ja puutteet nykyisessä tutkimuksessa muodostavat lähtökohdat tälle tutkimukselle.

Tämä tutkimus sijoittuu lapsuudentutkimuksen ja narratiivisen tutkimuksen leikkauspisteeseen. Lapset nähdään lapsuudentutkimukselle ominaisella tavalla oman elämänsä asiantuntijoina ja aktiivisina ja pätevinä toimijoina, joilla on tutkimuksen näkökulmasta merkityksellistä tietoa ja kokemusta (Colliver, 2017; Mayall, 2015). Lapset nähdään myös oikeuksien haltijoina: lapsilla on oikeus ilmaista näkemyksensä, tulla vakavasti otetuiksi ja vaikuttaa niin omaan elämään kuin laajemmin yhteiskunnan toimintaan (YK, 1989; Uprichard, 2010). Tämän tutkimuksen tieteenteoreettiset lähtökohdat ja metodiset valinnat tukeutuvat narratiivisuuteen (Heikkinen, 2018; Riessman, 2008). Narratiivisen lähestymistavan mukaisesti lasten nähdään rakentavan todellisuuttaan, järkeistävän ja antavan merkityksiä kokemuksilleen kertomalla (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Moran ym. 2021a). Lasten kertomukset tarjoavat siten tutkijalle yhden väylän päästä lähemmäksi lasten maailmoja.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on lisätä ymmärrystä lasten ja vanhempien välisistä konflikteista pienten lasten näkökulmasta. Tarkemmin, tämä tutkimus tarkastelee sukupuolinäkökulmasta sitä, kuinka 3–6-vuotiaat suomalaislapset kuvailevat, järkeistävät ja ymmärtävät lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksia kuvitteellisissa lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden konflikteissa. Tutkimukselle asetettiin kaksi tutkimuskysymystä: 1) Kuinka pienet, 3–6-vuotiaat lapset kuvailevat eri tarinatyypeissä lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksia kuvitteellisissa lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden konflikteissa? ja 2) Miten pienten, 3–6-vuotiaiden poikien ja tyttöjen kuvaukset lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksista eroavat eri tarinatyypeissä?

Tutkimukseen osallistui yhteensä 45 suomalaislasta (19 poikaa, 26 tyttöä). Lapset olivat 3–6-vuotiaita ja heidät rekrytoitiin kolmen eri päiväkodin kautta. Aineisto kerättiin vuosien 2019–2020 aikana Tarinataikurituokiot-menetelmällä, joka hyödyntää tarinankerrontaa ja leikkiä eli lapsille luontaisia tapoja viestiä näkemyksiään ja mielipiteitään (Koivula ym. 2020; Turja & Laakso, 2011). Kerronnallinen aineisto analysoitiin narratiivisia menetelmiä hyödyntäen (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Labov, 1976; Riessman, 2008) ja kerronnasta tunnistettiin 104 konfliktitarinaa, joista pojat kertoivat 43 tarinaa ja tytöt 61 tarinaa.

Lasten konfliktikertomuksia tarkasteltiin kolmessa osatutkimuksessa. Osatutkimus I tarkasteli lapsen osallisuutta pienten poikien kerronnassa ja tunnisti neljä lapsen osallisuutta kuvaavaa tarinatyyppiä: sivuutettu osallisuus, vanhempijohtoinen osallisuus, lapsijohtoinen osallisuus, ja dialoginen osallisuus. Osatutkimus II tarkasteli lapsen toimijuutta ja valtaa pienten tyttöjen kerronnassa ja tunnisti viisi tarinatyyppiä: sovittelu- ja kompromissitarinat, antautumistarinat, sinnikkyystarinat, solidaarisuustarinat ja umpikujatarinat. Osatutkimus III tarkasteli lapsen toimijuutta ja vaikutusmahdollisuuksia pienten lasten kerronnassa ja miten poikien ja tyttöjen kerronta erosi. Osatutkimus tunnisti kolme päätyyppiä: myöntymistarinat, vastustustarinat, sekä neuvottelutarinat.

Tulokset osoittivat, että lasten kertomista eri tarinatyypeistä yleisin oli se, jossa lapsen kuvattiin myöntyvän vanhemman tahtoon (osatutkimus I-III). Lapsen osallisuus toteutui vanhemman ehdoilla tai se sivuutettiin (osatutkimus I). Vanhemman kuvattiin käyttävän ylivaltaansa lapseen, mikä ilmeni lapsen ohjaamisena, kontrollointina ja uhkailuna (osatutkimus II). Vaikka tarinoissa vanhempi rajoitti lapsen toimijuutta melko voimakkaasti, kerronnasta tulkittiin lapsen säilyttävän tunteen toimijuudesta pitämällä kiinni vihan tunteistaan ja järkeistämällä myöntymisen omana mielenmuutoksena ja päätöksenä (osatutkimus III). Lapsen toimijuutta myöntymisenä kuvaavissa tarinoissa lapsen vaikutusmahdollisuuksien kerrottiin kuitenkin rajoittuvan vain konfliktin kulkua vaikeuttamaan ja viivyttämään tai saamaan riittämättömiä perusteluja vanhemman toimille ja päätöksille.

Lasten kerronnasta tunnistettiin toinen tarinatyyppi, jossa lapsi vastusti vanhempaansa ja eikä myöntynyt vanhemman tahtoon vanhemman toiminnasta riippumatta (osatutkimus I-III). Vastustusta kuvaavissa tarinoissa lapsen kerrottiin toimivan yhteistyöhaluttomasti, jopa aggressiivisesti, ja lapsen osallisuus toteutui lapsen ehdoilla (osatutkimus I). Toisaalta sinnikkään vastustuksen ja taktisten toimien keinoin lapsen kerrottiin pystyvän saamaan tahtonsa läpi (osatutkimus II). Joskus lapsen periksiantamattomasta vastustuksesta huolimatta konfliktit jäivät tarinoissa ratkeamatta. Siten lapsella oli joko hetkellisesti ylivaltaa tai lapsi ja vanhempi kuvattiin tasavertaisina. Vastustusta kuvaavissa tarinoissa lapsen vaikutus ilmeni kieltäytymisenä myöntymästä vanhemman tahtoon ja vanhemman toimien ja päätösten estämisenä (osatutkimus III).

Kolmas tarinatyyppi kuvasi lapsen toimijuutta neuvotteluna, vaikka hän saattoi satunnaisesti vastustaa (osatutkimus I-III). Konfliktit perustuivat lapsen osallisuudelle ja dialogisuudelle ja lapsi ja vanhempi löysivät molempia tyydyttävän ratkaisun (osatutkimus I). Konfliktien kuvattiin sisältävän neuvottelua, mukautumista, sekä yhteistä päätöksentekoa (osatutkimus II). Kompromissin löytyminen ei kuitenkaan aina ollut yksinkertaista vaan vaati joskus molemminpuolista omien näkemysten aktiivista perustelemista (osatutkimus III). Neuvottelua kuvaavissa tarinoissa lapsella oli riittävät mahdollisuudet vaikuttaa mielekkään lopputuloksen löytymiseen.

Tutkimuksessa havaittiin eroja poikien ja tyttöjen kuvauksissa lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksista eri tarinatyypeissä. Vain pojat kertoivat lapsen vihamielisestä, jopa aggressiivisesta käyttäytymisestä ilman katumusta riippumatta siitä, miten vanhempi käyttäytyi (osatutkimus I, III). Poikien tarinat lapsen vastustuksesta kuvasivat lapsen pystyvän toteuttamaan toimijuuttaan ja vaikuttamaan haluamallaan tavalla. Lisäksi vain tytöt kertoivat lapsen myöntyvän vihaisen ja kontrolloivan vanhemman tahtoon miellyttääkseen häntä (osatutkimus II, III). Joskus tyttöjen tarinoissa lapsen kerrottiin kompensoivan sopimattomaksi tulkitsemaansa käyttäytymistä esimerkiksi tuomalla vanhemmalle kukkia. Tällaiset tyttöjen tarinat lapsen solidaarisuudesta tunnistettiin myöntymistarinoiden alatyypiksi (osatutkimus III). Tytöt kertoivat myös tarinoita, joissa lapsi vastusti vanhempaansa vihamielisesti, mutta pyysi anteeksi käyttäytymistään. Anteeksipyyntötarinat tunnistettiin neuvottelutarinoiden alatyypiksi ja ne olivat

osoitus lapsen kyvystä reflektoida omaa käyttäytymistään ja tulkita vihamielinen käytös epäsopivaksi. Anteeksipyyntötarinat korostivat osapuolten rakentavia toimia, joiden kautta lapsi ja vanhempi löysivät molempia tyydyttävän ratkaisun.

Tässä tutkimuksessa tunnistettiin pienten lasten moninaiset tavat jäsentää lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksia lapsi–vanhempisuhteiden konflikteissa. Lapsen toimijuus vaihteli myöntymisestä vastustukseen ja neuvottelemiseen: lapsella oli vain vähän, jos lainkaan vaikutusmahdollisuuksia, hän pystyi vaikuttamaan tai estämään vanhemman toimia ja päätöksiä tai hän edisti yhteisen sopimuksen löytymistä, jolloin myös lapsen osallisuus toteutui. Lasten tarinat osoittivat myös lapsen rakenteellisen aseman sukupolvijärjestyksessä. Kuten tarinat lapsen myöntymisestä osoittivat, lapsen osallisuus toteutui vain vanhemman ehdoilla tai se sivutettiin. Lapselta edellytettiin myöntymistä ja vanhempi kontrolloi lapsen käyttäytymistä ja konfliktin lopputulosta. Näissä tarinoissa vanhemman kuvattiin jättävän huomiotta lapsen näkemykset ja tunteet. Nämä havainnot vahvistavat aiempia länsimaisia tutkimustuloksia haasteista, joita erityisesti pienet lapset kohtaavat konflikteissa (Della Porta ym., 2019; Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009). Tällaiset haasteet voivat liittyä näkemykseen lapsista passiivisina vanhempien vallan vastaanottajina, joiden vastustus tulkitaan ongelmalliseksi tai jotka ajatellaan kykenemättömiksi tunnistamaan omaa parastaan ja tarvitsevan siten huolenpitoa. Lapsen myöntymistä kuvaavien tarinoiden perusteella sukupolvien väliset suhteet eivät ole kokonaan muuttuneet suomalaisperheissä hierarkkisista demokraattisiksi ja neuvotelluiksi.

Tarinoista ilmeni myös lapsen mahdollisuus hämärtää, rakentaa uudelleen ja jopa kääntää ympäri perinteinen lapsi–vanhempisuhteen valtahierarkia. Tarinat lapsen vastustuksesta osoittivat lapsen kyvyn toimia vanhempien vallasta huolimatta ja jopa vaikuttaa konfliktin ratkaisuun haluamallaan tavalla (ks. esim. Sihvonen, 2020). Vaikka näiden tarinoiden voidaan tulkita kuvastavan lapsen yritystä ilmaista mielipiteensä ja vaikuttaa omaan elämäänsä, niiden voidaan myös nähdä kertovan lapsen käytöksestä, joka ei rakenna vastavuoroisuutta ja dialogia, vaan voivat edistää vastakkainasettelua. Lasten tarinat myös osoittivat, että konfliktit voivat tarjota lapselle mahdollisuuksia puolustaa näkemyksiään, neuvotella ja edistää yhteisymmärryksen saavuttamista. Lapsen aktiivista neuvottelua kuvaavissa tarinoissa lapsi–vanhempisuhteet kerrottiin perustuvan vastavuoroiseen keskusteluun ja päätöksentekoon. Siten tämä tutkimus vahvistaa aiempien tutkimusten havaintoja siitä, että osallistuminen kaksisuuntaiseen dialogiin, kuulluksi tuleminen ja riittävien perustelujen saaminen päätöksille ilman painostusta tai manipulointia tukevat lasten toimijuuden mahdollisuuksia (Horgan ym., 2020; Lundy, 2007), myös konfliktitilanteissa. Tarinat neuvottelusta havainnollistavat, miten lasten osallisuuden toteutuessa voi konflikteilla olla myös myönteinen merkitys kasvatuksessa.

Vaikka sekä pojat että tytöt kertoivat lapsen vastustavista toimista, vain poikien tarinoissa lapsi pystyi vaikuttamaan konfliktin lopputulokseen haluamallaan tavalla vastustamalla vihamielisesti (ks. Baker et al., 2016). Tyttöjen tarinoissa lapsen mahdollisuudet saada tahtonsa läpi vaati lapselta taktisia toimia ja lapsen vihamielinen vastustus johti joko ratkeamattomaan konfliktiin tai lapsen

solidaarisuuteen ja anteeksipyyntöön. Vain tytöt kuvasivat lapsen empaattisia ja hoivaavia toimia ja siten tunnistivat kulttuurisen käsityksen "kiltin" lapsen käytöksestä (esim. Greene & Nixon, 2020). Vaikka solidaarisuus tulkittiin lapsen relationaalisen toimijuuden osoitukseksi, tällaisen toimijuuden voi ajatella myös kertovan lapsen heikommasta asemasta sukupolvijärjestyksessä (Alanen, 2009), jota lapsi itse solidaarisuudellaan vahvistaa.

Tämän tutkimuksen tuloksilla on käytännön merkitystä vanhemmille ja laajemmin myös esimerkiksi varhaiskasvatuksessa pienten lasten kanssa työskenteleville aikuisille. Tutkimus rohkaisee aikuisia pohtimaan kriittisesti sitä, miten he kohtaavat pieniä lapsia ja rajoittavat, joskus tahattomasti, lasten toimijuutta. Vanhempien tulisi kuunnella sensitiivisesti lasten erilaisia tapoja ilmaista näkemyksiään ja nähdä lasten vastustus pikemminkin toimijuuslinssin läpi kuin tarpeena tukahduttaa (esim. Kuczynski ym., 2018). Joskus lasten osallisuus ymmärretään väärin lapsen mahdollisuutena päättää asioista yksin ja toimia haluamallaan tavalla. Lasten oikeus osallistua ja vaikuttaa ei kuitenkaan tarkoita sitä, että lapset saavat toimia miten haluavat ja sivuuttaa toisten näkemykset. Osallisuus tarkoittaa sitä, että lapset voivat ilmaista mielipiteensä vapaasti sekä osallistua dialogiin ja yhteiseen päätöksentekoon tasavertaisina toimijoina (Lundy, 2007; Warming, 2019; YK, 1989).

Tämä tutkimus lisää myös tietoisuutta sukupuolten välisistä eroista siinä, millaisia merkityksiä pojat ja tytöt liittävät lapsen toimijuuden mahdollisuuksiin konflikteissa sekä miten perheissä ja lasten kanssa työskenneltäessä voidaan toistaa kapeita sukupuoliin liittyviä stereotyyppisiä odotuksia pojille ja tytöille sopivasta käyttäytymisestä. Jos pojat oppivat ilmaisemaan toimijuuttaan korostamalla vain itsenäisyyttä ja aggressiota, he eivät välttämättä opi tärkeitä sosioemotionaalisia taitoja, kuten oikeudenmukaisuutta ja yhteistä päätöksentekoa. Vastaavasti, jos tyttöjä ohjataan vain miellyttämään toisia, he oppivat tukahduttamaan omat tarpeensa ja tunteensa. Tämä voi muodostua lapselle taakaksi ja johtaa jopa siihen, että lapsi omaksuu hänelle kuulumattoman roolin sukupolvien välisissä konflikteissa. Jokainen konfliktitilanne tarjoaa aikuisille mahdollisuuden joko vahvistaa olemassa olevaa sukupuoli-ideologiaa tai haastaa se.

Väitöstutkimuksen mukaan demokraattisessa, vastavuoroisuuteen ja dialogisuuteen perustuvassa suhteessa lapsen toimijuutta kunnioitetaan, jolloin lapsi voi harjoitella toisten kuuntelua ja kompromissien tekoa. Tällaiset taidot ovat ensiarvoisen tärkeitä myös lasten muissa ihmissuhteissa sekä tulevaisuuden kansalaisyhteiskunnassa toimimisessa. Siten, konfliktit voisivat olla oppimisen areenoja, joilla on myönteinen rooli kasvatuksessa ja jotka edistävät kaikkien lasten oikeuksien toteutumista sekä sukupuolten tasa-arvoa (YK, 1989).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Pictures used in Story Magician's Play Time
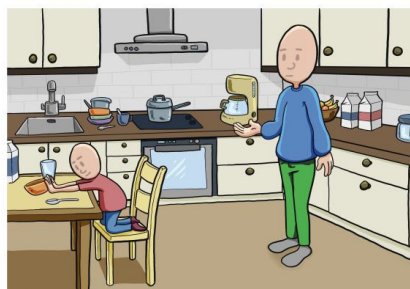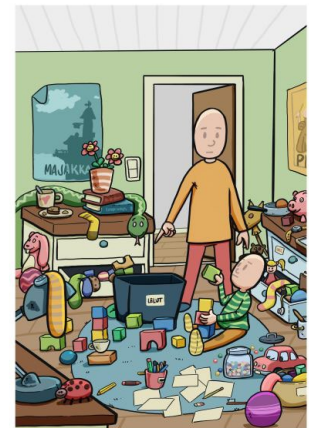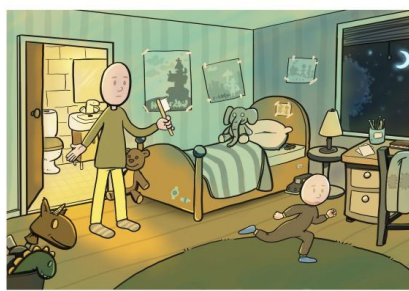
Appendix 2: Example pictures of the emotion cards used in the SMPT session

Appendix 3: Snapshot of the constructed play situation and the hand puppet

TARINATAIKURIN SOPIMUSPAPERI

Lapsen nimi: _____

Ikä: _____

MINÄ TIEDÄN NYT, MIKÄ ON TARINATAIKURIN TUOKIO. ANNAN TARINATAIKURILLE JA HÄNEN TUTKIJA-APULAISILLEEN LUVAN KUUNNELLA SALANIMELLÄ KERTOMIANI TARINOITA.

SALANIMENI

_____

SORMENPÄÄLLÄ PAINETAAN JÄLKI TÄHÄN RUUTUUN JA VAHVISTETAAN LUPA.

HALUAN KOTIIN VIETÄVÄKSI TIIVISTELMÄN TARINASTANI, JOKA KERTOO SIITÄ KUN

_____

Appendix 5: Example story showing the application of Labov's model

Researcher: What do you think, what might happen in this picture?
[Orientation]
Rosa: That girl secretly took the tablet but then her mother comes and says, "Now is not the time to play with the tablet."
[Evaluation]
Researcher: How might the mother feel?
Rosa: Maybe the mother gets a little angry because the girl secretly took out the tablet.
Researcher: The mother gets a little angry. How about the girl?
Rosa: [pondering] I think the girl is embarrassed.
Researcher: What do you think they might say to each other in your story?
[Complicating action]
Rosa: The mother says, "You should go and do something else", and then the girl says, "Can I play this game to the end?"
Researcher: What might the mother answer?
[Resolution]
Rosa: The mother says, "Okay, but then you need to put the tablet away." Then the girl invents some fun play.
[Evaluation]
Researcher: How do you think the girl feels now?
Rosa: Happy.
Researcher: How about the mother?
Rosa: Just happy after that.

Appendix 6: Research information sheet for parent/guardian

TUTKIMUSINFO

Hei lapsen vanhempi/huoltaja!

Olen Maria Lahtinen, kasvatustieteen tohtoriopiskelija Jyväskylän yliopiston kasvatustieteiden laitokselta. Teen tutkimusta 4–7-vuotiaiden lasten kokemuksista perhearjen ristiriitatilanteisiin liittyen. **Kerään tutkimuksen tarkoituksen mukaisesti lasten tarinoita perhearjen haastavista tilanteista ja niiden ratkaisuista lapsi-huoltajasuhteissa.**

Tutkimusaineisto kerätään Tarinataikurituokiot-menetelmällä, jossa lapsi kertoo kuvitteellisen tarinan tarinakortin avulla. Tarinakorteissa on kuvattuina perhearjen yleisimpiä ristiriitatilanteita, kuten ruokailu, pukeminen ja nukkumaanmeno. **Lapsen kertoma tarina myös leikitään draamavälinein**. Aineistonkeruuseen osallistuu lapsen lisäksi tutkija (Maria), eikä lapsen kertomista tarinoista keskustella päiväkodin henkilökunnan kanssa. Aineistonkeruu videonauhoitetaan. Lapset saavat halutessaan tutkijan kirjoittaman tiivistetyn tarinan lapsen kertomasta tarinasta ja oivalluksista.

Olen tavattavissa **XXXX päiväkodissa XX.XX.XXXX** ja **XX.XX.XXXX, klo XX.XX-XX.XX** ja **XX.XX-XX.XX** välisenä aikana, jolloin kerron lisää tutkimuksesta ja sen toteuttamisesta. Samalla voitte palauttaa allekirjoitetun **suostumuksen lapsen tutkimukseen osallistumisesta sekä täytetyn huoltajia koskevan taustatietolomakkeen. Voitte toimittaa ne allekirjoitettuna myös suoraan päiväkotiin suljetussa kirjekuoressa XX.XX.XXXX mennessä**.

Tutkimukseen osallistuminen on täysin vapaaehtoista ja lapsi voi missä vaiheessa tahansa keskeyttää osallistumisensa. **Tutkimuksen tiedot ovat luottamuksellisia, joten tutkittavien henkilöllisyys ei tule ilmi missään tutkimuksen teon vaiheessa**. Tutkimuksen tarkoitus ja sen kulku selitetään lapselle ja myös lapselta itseltään pyydetään tutkimuslupa. Mikäli teillä vanhemmilla/huoltajilla herää jotain kysyttävää tutkimukseeni liittyen, otathan rohkeasti yhteyttä minuun tai väitöskirjatyöni ohjaajiin.

Ystävällisin terveisin ja yhteistyöstä kiittäen:

Yhteystiedot	Maria Lahtinen, jatko-opiskelija	Marja Leena Böök, KT, yliopistonlehtori, ohjaaja	Eija Sevón, KT, yliopistotutkija, ohjaaja
puh.	XXXXXXXXXX	+358408054521	+358408053650
s-posti	maria.e.lahtinen@student.jyu.fi	marja.leena.book@jyu.fi	eija.sevon@jyu.fi

Appendix 7: Consent form for parent/guardian

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

SUOSTUMUS LAPSEN OSALLISTUMISESTA TIETEELLISEEN TUTKI-MUKSEEN

LASTANI ON PYYDETTY OSALLISTUMAAN TUTKIMUKSEEN: TYTTÖJEN JA POIKIEN TUNTEET JA TOIMIJUUS LAPSI-VANHEMPISUHTEIDEN RISTI-RIITATILANTEISSA

Olen perehtynyt tutkimusta koskeviin tiedotteisiin (tutkimuslupakirje ja tietosuojailmoitus) sekä taustatietolomakkeeseen ja saanut riittävästi tietoa tutkimuksesta ja sen toteuttamisesta. Olen saanut riittävän vastauksen kaikkiin tutkimusta koskeviin mahdollisiin kysymyksiini. Ymmärrän, että tähän tutkimukseen osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista. Minulla on oikeus, milloin tahansa tutkimuksen aikana ja syytä ilmoittamatta keskeyttää lapseni tutkimukseen osallistuminen tai peruuttaa suostumukseni tutkimukseen. Tutkimuksen keskeyttämisestä tai suostumuksen peruuttamisesta ei aiheudu minulle kielteisiä seuraamuksia.

Antamalla lapselleni luvan osallistua tutkimukseen sekä allekirjoittamalla suostumuslomakkeen hyväksyn lapseni ja minun antamien tietojen käytön tietosuojailmoituksessa kuvattuun tutkimukseen.

Lapseni (nimi, sukunimi, päiväkodin ja kotiryhmän nimi) _____

_____

saa osallistua Maria Lahtisen väitöskirjatutkimukseen ☐ **KYLLÄ** ☐ EI

Haluan **saada lisätietoa vanhemmuutta koskevasta jatkotutkimuksesta,** joka liittyy

Marja Leena Böökin ja Eija Sevonin tutkimukseen. ☐ **KYLLÄ** ☐ EI

   Lisätietoa voi lähettää sähköpostiini: _____

Pyydän, että palautatte tämän suostumuksen joko suoraan Marialle tai suljetussa kirjekuoressa lapsenne mukana päiväkotiin.

_____   _____
Allekirjoitus   *Päiväys*

_____
Nimen selvennys

Suostumus vastaanotettu

_____   _____
Suostumuksen vastaanottajan allekirjoitus   *Päiväys*

_____
Nimen selvennys

TAUSTATIETOLOMAKE   TUTKIMUKSEEN   OSALLISTUVAN   LAPSEN KANSSA SAMASSA TALOUDESSA ASUVALLE

Taustatiedot	Vanhempi/huoltaja	Vanhempi/huoltaja
Nimi ja sukunimi		
Ikä		
Koulutus		

Perhemuoto: □ ydinperhe

□ uusperhe
□ yhden vanhemman perhe

□ sateenkaariperhe (kahden naisen/kahden miehen perhe)
□ sijaisperhe
□ muu, mikä   _____

Sisarusten lukumäärä ja iät: _____

_____

Pyydän, että palautatte suostumuksen ja taustatietolomakkeen joko suoraan Marialle tai lapsenne mukana suljetussa kirjekuoressa päiväkotiin XX.XX.XXXX mennessä.

Kiitos avustanne!

18.8.2019 Tietosuoja-asetus (679/2016) 12-14, 30 artikla

Jyväskylän yliopisto

TIETOSUOJAILMOITUS TUTKIMUKSESTA TUTKIMUKSEEN OSALLISTUVALLE

Tutkimukseen osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista, eikä tutkittavan ole pakko toimittaa mitään tietoja. Tutkimukseen osallistumisen voi keskeyttää.

Teiltä pyydetään suostumus siihen, että lapsenne saa osallistua tähän tutkimukseen, joka on kuvattu tässä tiedotteessa. Pyydän sinua lapsen vanhempana/huoltajana tutustumaan tähän tiedotteeseen ja sen jälkeen antamaan erillisen suostumuksen lapsenne tutkimukseen osallistumisesta.

Tässä tutkimuksessa lapset pääsevät kertomaan kuvitteellisia tarinoita perhearjen ristiriitatilanteista yhdessä tutkijan kanssa.

1. TUTKIMUKSEN NIMI, LUONNE JA KESTO

Maria Lahtisen väitöskirjatutkimus: *Pienten lasten kerrontaa tunteista ja toimijuudesta lapsi-vanhempisuhteiden ristiriitatilanteissa.*

Väitöskirjatutkimus on osa KT, yliopistotutkija Eija Sevónin johtamaa tutkimushanketta *Konfliktit ja vallankäyttö lasten ja nuorten lähisuhteissa – tarkastelukohteena kerrotut tunteet ja toimijuus*

Tutkimusaineistoa kerätään lapsilta päiväkodissa vähintään yhden tapaamiskerran aikana, mutta lapsi voi halutessaan osallistua useampaan tapaamiseen. Väitöstutkimuksen arvioitu valmistumisaika on vuonna 2023.

2. REKISTERINPITÄJÄT JA TUTKIMUSTA JOHTAVAT HENKILÖT

Tutkimuksen rekisterinpitäjät: Jyväskylän yliopisto, Seminaarinkatu 15, PL 35, 40014 Jyväskylän yliopisto. Vaihde (014) 260 1211, Y-tunnus 0245894-7. **Jyväskylän yliopiston tietosuojavastaava:** tietosuoja@jyu.fi**, puh. 040 805 3297**

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Tutkimuksen suorittajat: Henkilötietoja käsittelevät ovat sopimussuhteessa yliopistoon. Lisätietoja henkilöistä saa tutkimuksen johtajalta.

Henkilötietojen luovuttaminen: Henkilötietoja käsittelevät väitöskirjatutkijan lisäksi *Konfliktit ja vallankäyttö lasten ja nuorten lähisuhteissa* -hankkeeseen osallistuvat tutkijat: Marja Leena Böök, Marianne Notko, Sanna Moilanen, Eija Salonen ja Eija Sevón. Lisäksi tutkimusaineistoa voidaan käyttää hankkeen tutkijoiden ohjaamissa opinnäytetöissä (kandidaatin ja pro gradu –tutkielmissa sekä väitöskirjatutkimuksissa). Analyysejä varten tutkimusaineisto pseudonymisoidaan, jolloin siitä muutetaan tai poistetaan kaikki tutkittavan tunnistamisen suoraan mahdollistavat tiedot (esimerkiksi nimet). Kaikkia osapuolia sitovat salassapitovelvollisuudet. Tiedot luovutetaan opiskelijoille litterointia varten, muille henkilöille koodattuina.

3. TUTKIMUKSEN TAUSTA, TARKOITUS JA TOTEUTTAMINEN KÄYTÄNNÖSSÄ

Maria Lahtisen väitöskirjatutkimuksen *Pienten lasten kerrontaa tunteista ja toimijuudesta lapsi-vanhempisuhteiden ristiriitatilanteissa* tavoitteena on tarkastella 4-7-vuotiaiden leikki-ikäisten lasten kuvitteellisia tarinoita lapsi-vanhempisuhteiden ristiriitatilanteista. Tutkimuksessa ollaan kiinnostuneita tarinoissa esiintyvien lasten tunteista ja toiminnan tavoista perhearjen konfliktitilanteissa sekä rakennetaan uutta ymmärrystä niiden merkityksistä lasten näkökulmasta. Tutkimus tuottaa myös uusia menetelmiä ja ratkaisumalleja lapsi-vanhempisuhteiden ristiriitojen käsittelyyn.

Eija Sevónin johtamassa tutkimushankkeessa *Konfliktit ja vallankäyttö lasten ja nuorten lähisuhteissa – tarkastelukohteena kerrotut tunteet ja toimijuus* etsitään vastauksia seuraaviin kysymyksiin: 1) Miten yleisiä konfliktit ja vallankäyttö ovat lasten ja nuorten lähisuhteissa, 2) Millaisia konflikteja ja vallankäyttöä lähisuhteissa esiintyy lasten ja nuorten kertomuksissa, 3) Millaisia positioita, toimijuutta ja tunteita lapsilla ja aikuisilla on vallankäytön ja konfliktitilanteissa lasten ja nuorten kertomuksissa, 4) Mitä lasten ja nuorten lähisuhteiden vallankäyttö merkitsee lasten ja nuorten hyvinvoinnille ja 5) Miten lasten ja nuorten vallankäytön ja konfliktien teemoja voidaan käsitellä lasten ja nuorten yhteisöissä uusilla, lasten ja nuorten kuulemiseen perustuvin, draamallisin, ja heidän itsensä kehittämin menetelmin.

Tutkimusaineisto kerätään kolmivaiheisella Tarinataikurimenetelmällä (ks. kuvio 1) varhaiskasvatukseen osallistuvilta lapsilta rekrytoitavien päiväkotien valitsemissa tiloissa. Ennen varsinaista aineistonkeruuta esittelen tutkimukseen osallistuville lapsille Tarinataikurimenetelmän (Tarinataikurin salkun, tarina- ja tunnekortit sekä draamaleikkivälineet). Tavoitteena on tutustua lapsiin ja virittäytyä tunteiden nimeämiseen ja ymmärtämiseen. **Varsinaisessa aineistonkeruussa lapsenne osallistuu Tarinataikurituokioon, jossa lapsenne kertoo yhdestä tai useammasta valitsemastaan kuvasta tarinan yhdessä tutkijan kanssa, minkä jälkeen se leikitään draamaleikkivälineillä.** Lapsenne saa kertoa, mitä kuvakortissa esitetyssä tilanteessa on tapahtunut, mitä kukin mahtaa sanoa, ajatella ja tuntea sekä miten tilanne olisi mahdollista ratkaista kaikkia osapuolia tyydyttävällä tavalla. Apuna käytetään käsinukkea. Vaiheet 1-3 toteutetaan samalla lapsikohtaisella tapaamisella. Lapsenne voi halutessaan osallistua myös useampaan Tarinataikurituokioon.

Kuvio 1. Aineistonkeruun toteuttaminen

| VAIHE 1 | VAIHE 2 | VAIHE 3 |
| Tarinan kertominen | Tarinan leikkiminen | Tarinan reflektointi |
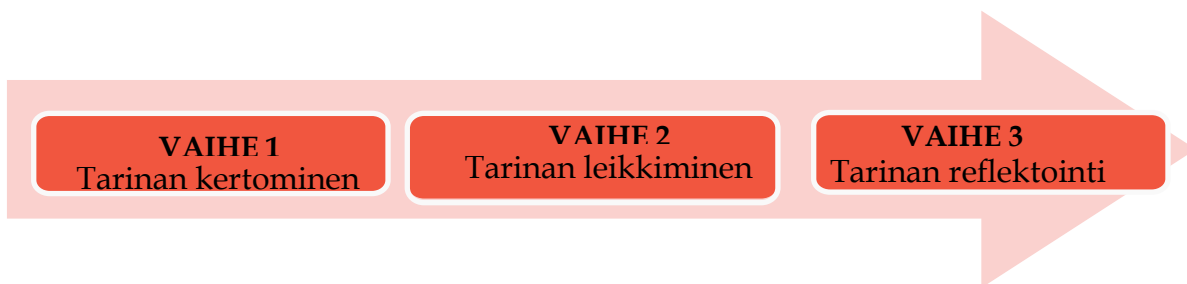
Lapselta kysytään halukkuutta osallistua Tarinatuokioon ja tarinan leikkimiseen. Lapselle kerrotaan osallistumisen vapaaehtoisuudesta ja siitä, että hänellä on oikeus keskeyttää osallistumisensa milloin tahansa. Lapsikohtainen tapaaminen videokuvataan, mikäli lapsi antaa siihen luvan. Vanhemmat/huoltajat voivat lapsensa suostumuksella saada väitöskirjatutkijan kirjoittaman tiivistelmän lapsensa kertomasta tarinasta. Aineistonkeruuseen ei osallistu päiväkodin henkilökuntaa. Vanhemmilta tiedustellaan suostumuslomakkeessa myös kiinnostusta osallistua laajemman projektin vanhemmille suunnattuihin haastatteluihin lasten lähisuhteiden konflikteista ja vallankäytöstä.

4. HENKILÖTIEDOT TUTKIMUSAINEISTOSSA

Tutkimuksessa kerätään taustatietoja vanhemmilta/huoltajilta erillisellä lomakkeella (lapsen nimi ja sukunimi sekä sukupuoli, lapsen vanhemman/vanhempien/huoltajan/huoltajien etu- ja sukunimi, ikä, koulutus, perhemuoto, lapsen asumisjärjestelyt, lasten lukumäärä ja lasten iät sekä sähköpostiosoite) ja lapselta kirjataan ylös Tarinataikurituokiossa nimi, ikä, lapsen sukupuoli ja lempipuuhat. Lapsi antaa suostumuksensa tutkimukseen osallistumisesta painamalla sopimuspapereihin sormenjälkensä (biometrinen tunniste). Kerättyä tutkimusaineistoa ovat myös videot. Lapsi saa keksiä

itselleen salanimen, jota käytetään tutkimusaineistossa (ks. kohta 6 henkilötietojen suojaaminen). Henkilötietoja ei luovuteta tämän tutkimuksen ulkopuolelle ilman erillistä lupaa eikä henkilötietoja käsitellä EU/ETA ulkopuolella.

5. TUTKIMUKSEN MAHDOLLISET HYÖDYT JA HAITAT TUTKITTAVILLE

Henkilötietojen käsittelyyn ei ole tunnistettu liittyvän erityisiä riskejä. Tutkimuksen hyötyjä lapselle ovat heidän tunteensa kuulluksi tulemisesta ja osallisuudesta. Tässä tutkimuksessa lapset pääsevät kertomaan kokemuksistaan tarinoiden avulla ja niiden kautta yhdessä tutkijan kanssa. Tarinataikurituokio on koettu lasten keskuudessa erittäin mielekkääksi aineistonkeruumenetelmäksi, jossa lapsen toiminnan näkökulmasta tärkein sija annetaan lapsen leikille. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, miten tutkittavat kertovat ja millaisena ristiriitatilanteet jäsentyvät lasten tarinoissa.

Tutkijoilla on lakiin perustuva ilmoitusvelvollisuus kertoa sosiaali- ja terveysviranomaisille, jos tutkimuksen aikana ilmenee vakava epäily lapsiin kohdistuvasta väkivallasta tai kaltoinkohtelusta.

6. HENKILÖTIETOJEN SUOJAAMINEN

Alkuperäisaineistojen käsittelyssä ja tallennuksessa noudatetaan erityistä huolellisuutta. Tutkimuksen teossa esille tulevat tiedot ovat ehdottoman luottamuksellisia, eikä salassa pidettäviä tietoja välitetä sähköpostitse. Videokuvattu aineisto siirretään ja tallennetaan mahdollisimman nopeasti Jyväskylän yliopiston tarjoamille tietosuojatuille asemille, joissa aineisto on henkilökohtaisten käyttäjätunnusten ja salasanojen takana. Vanhemmilta kerätty taustatietolomake säilytetään lukollisessa kaapissa. Tutkimusaineistoa ei säilytetä kiintolevyillä tai muistitikuilla. Tutkimuksessa kerättyjä tietoja ja tutkimustuloksia käsitellään luottamuksellisesti tietosuojalainsäädännön edellyttämällä tavalla. Lapsen tai vanhemman/huoltajan tietoja ei voida tunnistaa tutkimukseen liittyvistä tutkimustuloksista, selvityksistä tai julkaisuista, vaan tutkimustuloksissa ja muissa asiakirjoissa lapseen viitataan vain tunnistekoodilla. Hankkeen valmistuttua tutkimusaineisto jää tutkijoiden käyttöön vuoden 2028 loppuun asti, minkä jälkeen kaikki henkilötietoja sisältävät tiedot tuhotaan tai anonymisoidaan. Anonymisoitu aineisto säilytetään kasvatustieteiden laitoksen tietosuojatuilla työasemilla.

Henkilötietojen suojaamiseksi käytetään seuraavia suojatoimia:

☒ tutkimuksella on vastuulliset johtajat

☒ henkilörekisterin käyttö perustuu asianmukaiseen tutkimussuunnitelmaan

☒ henkilörekisteriä käytetään vain historiallista tai tieteellistä tutkimusta varten

☒ henkilörekisteri hävitetään tai siirretään arkistoitavaksi tai sen tiedot muutetaan sellaiseen   muotoon, ettei tiedon kohde ole niistä tunnistettavissa, kun henkilötiedot eivät enää ole tarpeen tutkimuksen suorittamiseksi tai sen tulosten asianmukaisuuden varmistamiseksi.

☒ toimenpiteet, joilla parannetaan henkilötietoja käsittelevän henkilöstön osaamista (tietosuojakoulutus)

☒ rekisterinpitäjän ja käsittelijän sisäiset toimenpiteet, joilla estetään pääsy henkilötietoihin

☒ tietoturvalliset henkilötietojen käsittely-ympäristöt

7. TUTKIMUSTULOKSET

Tutkimuksesta valmistuu tieteellisiä julkaisuja artikkeleina sekä raporttina.

8. TUTKITTAVAN OIKEUDET JA NIISTÄ POIKKEAMINEN

Tutkittavalla on oikeus peruuttaa antamansa suostumus, mikäli henkilötietojen käsittely perustuu suostumukseen. Tutkittavalla on oikeus tehdä valitus Tietosuojavaltuutetun toimistoon, mikäli tutkittava katsoo, että häntä koskevien henkilötietojen käsittelyssä on rikottu voimassa olevaa tietosuojalainsäädäntöä. (lue lisää: http://www.tietosuoja.fi). Lisätietoa rekisteröidyn oikeuksista: https://tietosuoja.fi/tunne-oikeutesi

9. HENKILÖTIETOJEN SÄILYTTÄMINEN JA ARKISTOINTI

Aineistoa säilytetään ilman tunnistetietoja siihen saakka, kunnes tutkimustulokset on saatu raportoitua viiden vuoden ajan vuoden 2023 loppuun asti. Hankkeen valmistuttua tutkimusaineisto jää tutkijoiden käyttöön vuoden 2028 loppuun asti, minkä jälkeen aineisto anonymisoidaan tai tuhotaan. Anonymisoitu aineisto säilytetään kasvatustieteiden laitoksen tietosuojatuilla työasemilla.

10. REKISTERÖIDYN OIKEUKSIEN TOTEUTTAMINEN

Jos sinulla on kysyttävää rekisteröidyn oikeuksista voit olla yhteydessä yliopiston tietosuojavastaavaan. Kaikki oikeuksien toteuttamista koskevat

pyynnöt toimitetaan Jyväskylän yliopiston kirjaamoon. Kirjaamo ja arkisto, PL 35 (C), 40014 Jyväskylän yliopisto, puh. 040 805 3472, e-mail: kirjaamo(at)jyu.fi. Käyntiosoite: Seminaarinkatu 15 C-rakennus (Yliopiston päärakennus, 1. krs), huone C 140.

ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

FROM BEING IGNORED TO ENGAGING IN A DIALOGUE: YOUNG BOYS' NARRATIVES OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN CHILD–PARENT CONFLICTS

by

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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 misinterpreted 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 increasingly 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 effective participation. First, children should have opportunities to express their views in a respectful 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 example, 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, influence 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 influence 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 participation, 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 parents' 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 whatever 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 expressing 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 communicating 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 threatening, 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 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
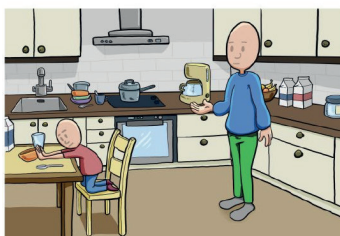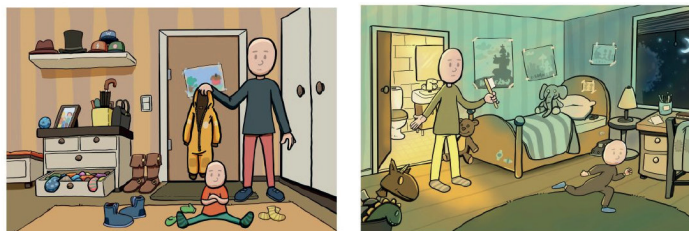
II

FROM SURRENDER STORIES TO PERSISTENCE STORIES: YOUNG GIRLS' NARRATIVES OF AGENCY AND POWER IN CHILD–PARENT CONFLICTS

by

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FROM SURRENDER STORIES TO PERSISTENCE STORIES: YOUNG GIRLS' NARRATIVES OF AGENCY AND POWER IN CHILD–PARENT CONFLICTS

Maria Lahtinen, Eija Sevón, and Marja Leena Böök

Abstract: This paper examines the dynamics of agency and power as revealed in young girls' fictional narratives about child–parent conflicts that are caused by incompatibility between the goals of children and parents in everyday family life. The data were collected from 26 girls aged 4 to 6 using the Story Magician's Play Time method. Narrative analysis yielded five types: mediation and compromise stories, surrender stories, persistence stories, solidarity stories, and standoff stories. In the girls' stories, agency and power were multifaceted and variable phenomena that were negotiated in a relational context in which the gender of the child and parent characters played an important role. Power relations tended to be narrated as more hierarchical and immutable in child–father conflicts, and more often as negotiated in child–mother conflicts. However, when narrated as deploying unyielding and tactical actions, the child characters were only able to exert power over the parent in girl–mother conflicts. Thus, some stories conveyed a clear, hierarchical generational order while others demonstrated children's agentic power to reshape adult dominance in child–adult conflicts in diverse ways. The practical implications of the findings are also discussed.

Keywords: child–parent conflict, generagency, narrative, power, young girl

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The notion of children as social actors and agents in their worlds is widely accepted. A key principle of the "new" sociology of childhood is that children construct and shape their lives reflexively instead of being passive recipients of parental and societal influence (e.g., Greene & Nixon, 2020; James & Prout, 1997; Leonard, 2016; Moran-Ellis, 2013). It is also acknowledged that children are rights holders, as stated in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; 1989). Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children have a right to express their views and have them considered. Further, the UNCRC states that children have the right to adults' protection and care.

With the advent of children's rights, traditional child–parent power relations have become more democratic and negotiable, and parents are no longer seen as having exclusive power over their children (e.g., Bjerke, 2011; Kuczynski, 2003; Sevón, 2015). However, even if the power dynamics of child–parent relations are more horizontal today than earlier, positionings in childhood and adulthood are interdependent and asymmetrical in many ways (Alanen, 2009, 2012; Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016). This power asymmetry manifests in conflicts in which the hierarchical child–parent relations may constrain young children's agency (Sevón, 2015; see also Recchia et al., 2010; Sorbring, 2009).

Research on young children's agency within the family, especially from the gender perspective, is lacking (see Bjerke, 2011; Sevón, 2015). This narrative study contributes to filling this gap by focusing on (a) children's agency and power in fictional child–parent conflicts and (b) how children narrate, interpret, and make sense of these situations. We chose to study girls, as agency has traditionally been seen as a male attribute (Greene & Nixon, 2020), meaning that females, with less agency, power, and privilege, are also lower in status than males (Hourigan, 2021).

Generagency and Child–Parent Conflicts

Definitions of agency vary and are problematic and contested (Greene & Nixon, 2020). Agency can be described as the capacity to act creatively, have a sense of autonomy, and accomplish things through action and bring about change (e.g., Bjerke, 2011; James & James, 2012; Rainio, 2008; Sevón, 2015). In this study, children's agency is also understood as a complex and constantly evolving process (Kumpulainen et al., 2018; Rainio, 2008; Sairanen et al., 2020) that in the family context is constructed and negotiated in reciprocal child–parent relations (Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016). Thus, agency is not something that children simply possess but something they achieve through their connection with other people (Moran-Ellis, 2013). In our view, children's agency also includes the capability to interpret, reinterpret, construct, and reconstruct meaning from their interactions with adults and with information and practices from the adult world (Corsaro, 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016).

The theoretical framework of this study draws on the concept of *generagency* (Leonard, 2016), developed to address the problematic issue of the interplay between structure and agency in the sociology of childhood. The concept has gained traction, especially in the field of childhood studies (e.g., Horgan et al., 2020), and furthers the work of Alanen (2009, 2012; see also Mayall, 2013; Qvortrup, 2009), who used the concept "generational order" as an analytical tool when considering the dynamic position of children in generational structures. Leonard (2016) sees generagency as encompassing both the concept of children's active agency in generational relations and that of the structural location of childhood. Leonard (2016) distinguished two subcategories of generagency: "inter-generagency" and "intra-generagency".

Inter-Generagency

Inter-generagency examines how children and adults, when performing their roles as "children" and "adults", are able to exercise power and control and modify social life. It sheds light on the relationship between childhood and adulthood and how these are impacted by age, gender, ethnicity, and class. Moran-Ellis (2013) argued that hierarchical child–adult relations may form barriers to young children's agentic abilities, as they position children as "development actors and hence repositions their actions as material for learning and correcting" (p. 315). Although power asymmetry permeates child–adult relations (Alanen, 2009, 2012; Leonard, 2016; Qvortrup, 2009), children have, to varying degrees, power to modify and shape decisions concerning themselves. Hence, power should be conceptualized as relational (e.g., Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016).

In families, children exercise agency within and across the asymmetrical and generational child–parent relations. This power asymmetry manifests in child–parent conflicts, where, as Nordic studies have shown, parents may rather powerfully guide young children's behavior (Sevón, 2015) and marginalize the child's influence (Recchia et al., 2010; Sorbring, 2009; cf. Bjerke, 2011). However, these studies also found that power is not related exclusively to parental control but also to children's possibilities to negotiate and resist, and thus bring about change in child–parent conflicts.

Resistance, which can be understood as an expression of agency (Kuczynski et al., 2018), can also be linked to the concept of "secondary adjustment" in describing situations where children resist indirectly and creatively and do not follow the rules set by adults (Corsaro, 2018). By opposing authority and questioning rules, children attempt to control their own lives and increase their opportunities for influence (Corsaro, 2018). Agency, however, should not be described solely in terms of resistance but should also encompass "intentionality, reflectivity, intended (and unintended) consequences" (Leonard, 2016, p. 124). Therefore, children's more subtle and creative ways to perform agency, such as through compliance with and acceptance of parental authority, should also be foregrounded when considering children's agency (Corsaro, 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Rainio, 2008). Children may, for example, decide to comply now as a strategy to attain more important goals in the future (Kuczynski, 2003). Nevertheless, to support children's

well-being, it is important that parents also see children's resistance as agentic rather than as always problematic and requiring suppression (Kuczynski et al., 2018).

Children's active efforts to resist parental power can also be interpreted as efforts to change the prevailing culture. Children do not simply internalize adult society but are active agents in challenging and changing the adult world (Leonard, 2016). Corsaro (2018) conceptualized this as interpretive reproduction or socialization, and it includes the active and creative participation of children in society as well as cultural reproduction. Therefore, children also reproduce, subvert, and redefine stereotypical understandings of childhood and thus shape childhood and its constructions (Corsaro, 2018; Greene & Nixon, 2020).

Intra-Generagency

According to Leonard (2016), intra-generagency crystallizes relationships among children themselves and highlights the heterogeneity of their lives. Different structural boundaries, such as gender, intersect with childhood (Alanen, 2009, 2012; Leonard, 2016; Morrow, 2006). This means that despite occupying the same structural position, children have diverse agentic possibilities (Leonard, 2016). For example, girls are stereotypically expected to nurture and care for others (Klaczynski et al., 2020; Kollmayer et al., 2018) and be cooperative, dependent, and passive (Williams & Best, 1990). Girls should also be empathetic (Hourigan, 2021), sensitive, avoid being noisy or dominant (Koenig, 2018), and follow society's expectations of girls as kind (Greene & Nixon, 2020). Boys, instead, are taught to take an agentic role and be active and independent (Hourigan, 2021; Kimmel, 2011; Koenig, 2018; Kollmayer et al., 2018). Morrow (2006) argued that in this regard family practices are deeply gendered and, according to Morawska (2020; see also Sorbring, 2009), there is also evidence that parents respond differently to daughters and sons.

Irrespective of the cultural context, it is assumed that girls may encounter social pressures to exercise their agency in accordance with the prevailing gendered expectations (Greene & Nixon, 2020). However, this raises the question that, if girls focus on expressing passivity, nurturance, and dependence, what barriers might this create to the realization of the agentic rights which belong to all children, irrespective of gender? The findings cited above indicate that girls' agency and power need to be considered in a multidimensional way, detached from gendered connotations.

Method

The Present Study

This study forms part of the first author's dissertation research on young girls' and boys' fictional narratives about child–parent conflicts. The aim of this sub-study is to analyze young girls' fictional narratives from the perspective of children's agency and power in child–parent conflicts. The following research questions were set: (a) What story types can be identified in the narratives of girls aged 4 to 6 about child–parent conflicts? (b) How do these girls position the

child and parent characters in relation to agency and power in the different story types? and (c) What role does gender play in these different story types?

Participants, Data Collection, and Ethical Issues

Finnish girls ($N = 26$) aged 4 to 6 were recruited via three different daycare centers in Central Finland after research permission was granted by the municipal early childhood authority. First, the girls' guardians were informed about the study and its adherence to the relevant ethical principles of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK; 2019). Voluntariness, the right to withdraw, and the confidentiality of personal data and aspects related to the retention of material were emphasized (TENK, 2019). Because guardians can act as gate-keepers of children's voices, they were invited to meet the researcher before giving their consent (Powell & Smith, 2009). After receiving the guardians' written informed consents, the first author introduced the research aim and the data collection method to the participating children in the daycare centers. The first author met the participants in small groups and, with pictorial support, went through the process of the study and emphasized that they could refuse to take part or discontinue their participation at any point during the study (TENK, 2019). This was done to make the children feel they had as much control of the process as possible (e.g., Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). The children were also assured that the narratives they produced would be handled confidentially and securely stored (TENK, 2019). A further aim of the group meetings was to build trust between the children and the researcher, owing not only to the sensitivity of the topic but also to the asymmetry of power between researcher and child (Powell & Smith, 2009).

After the children had given their verbal informed consent, the data were collected using the Story Magician's Play Time (SMPT) method, which was developed for listening to young children's accounts and perspectives through pictures, storytelling, and play (Laakso & Turja, 2011; see also Koivula et al., 2020). SMPT is based on the fact that telling stories and playing are inherent ways for young children to take part in social activities (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Karlsson, 2013; Puroila et al., 2012). Together with the first author, each child created a story from a picture depicting a hypothetical but familiar conflict situation. The child was free to provide narration about situations, events, people, and circumstances related to the picture. The vignettes acted as "triggers" for storytelling, enabling the child to express the imaginary characters' feelings and views as well as the causes and consequences of actions without any need to talk about personal experiences (see Koivula et al., 2020). The use of SMPT also offered the child space to be agentic as they were in control of the kind of information they disclosed (Palaiologou, 2017).

The seven different pictures used in this study draw on previous findings on common conflicts in child–parent relations (e.g., Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009). Among the situations depicted were viewing a tablet, eating, and brushing one's teeth (see Appendix). The children were free to choose which picture they wanted to discuss, and were encouraged to tell the researcher who the characters in the picture were, what was happening in it, and what each character might say, think, and feel. As the characters in the pictures were non-gendered, the children could decide on their gender.

The story was then acted out by the child and the first author using props. Six emotion cards (joy, sorrow, anger, fear, embarrassment, and astonishment) were utilized to discuss conflict-related feelings. At session end, the child was asked how the conflict might be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties and whether they had experienced similar situations (Koivula et al., 2020). The hand puppet included in the method allowed the child to reflect on their solutions and the lessons that might be learned. The hand puppet was also used at the beginning of the data collection to ponder its own gender together with that of the child. The puppet "asked" the child what they think about their own gender: whether they feel like a girl, a boy, something else, or don't know. All the participating children self-identified as girls.

The data collection took place in the children's daycare centers. Of the 26 participants, 13 were from families where both parents had tertiary education, seven from families where one parent had tertiary education, and six from families where both parents had non-tertiary education. Twenty-two participants lived in nuclear families, three in divorced families, and one in a blended family. Each child participated in one to three child-specific SMPT sessions. All sessions were recorded and videotaped with the child's consent.

Girls' stories about child–parent conflicts can inform us about how girls understand conflicts in child–parent relations and how they make sense of the children's and parents' agency and power in these situations (see Nicolopoulou, 2011). The girls' stories should be seen as combining personal processes by which they perceive their reality with additions and elaborations from their own imaginations (Engel, 2005). Therefore, the narrative approach offers an ethical way to approach sensitive topics (Barter & Renold, 2000) that does not impair children's loyalty to their parents. Storytelling combined with play shifts the balance of power between the child and the adult, encourages the child to join in, and offers the child ways to make sense of their life-world (Palaiologou, 2017; Puroila et al., 2012). However, as the researcher inevitably becomes a collaborator in such narrative methods, all the narratives in this study must be seen as co-created by the child and the researcher (Puroila et al., 2012; Riessman, 2008). From an ethical point of view, it was important that the first author focused on listening to the child and only interrupted the child's storytelling to ask supplementary questions to facilitate the child's construction of the story. The aim was to allow the child as much freedom as possible to make sense of their thoughts about child–parent conflicts both to themselves and to the researcher (Nicolopoulou, 2011; Labov, 1976).

Data Analysis

The first author gathered and transcribed the data. The excerpts cited in this article are translations from Finnish to English by the first author. Prior to the analysis, the first author pseudonymized the data and wrote short summaries of the narratives. Although messy, rich, and multidimensional, the children's narratives nonetheless formed temporal and plot-relevant entities (see Nicolopoulou, 2011; Riessman, 2008). The narratives were first subjected to structural narrative analysis (Labov, 1976) to identify their basic structure. This analysis focused on four

narrative elements: (a) orientation: the setting and the fictional characters in conflict and their behavior; (b) complicated action: something that prevents or facilitates events, in this case the child's or parent's reaction to the other party's resistance, propositions, and prohibitions; (c) evaluation: assessment of the course of events; and (d) resolution: who changed or had to change their behavior, and who achieved their goals.

In the narrative approach, it is assumed that all story types concern progress towards a specific goal, the outcome of which may be success or failure (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Plots can transform into one of three narrative forms in their evaluative shifts over time: regressive, stable, or progressive (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Applying this classification, the first author studied the evaluative shifts deployed by the child characters to achieve goals that deviated from their parent characters' goals during the conflict. In a regressive narrative, the storyline transforms to negative when the child is not allowed to get their way. This manifests as sadness, disappointment, or anger. In a stable narrative, the conflict remains unresolved or no conflict arises. The storyline is consistently negative or positive and the plot leaves the situation unchanged. In a progressive narrative, the child achieves the desired outcome, or the conflict is resolved to the satisfaction of both parties. The storyline thus transforms to positive and its aftermath is joy and a good mood.

According to Gergen and Gergen (1988), the different linear forms of narrative enable more complex varieties or genres of storytelling: comedy, romance, tragedy, and "happily-ever-after" (see Nicolopoulou, 2011). In comedy, challenges must be overcome before the happy final solution, and hence the storyline is progressive. Romance or heroic saga involves many victories and defeats, and therefore the storyline comprises both progressive and regressive phases. The protagonist survives conflicts as a hero. Thus, in both comedy and heroic saga, a regressive narrative is followed by a progressive narrative and the establishment of a new status quo. Tragedy, in contrast to heroic saga and comedy, follows a regressive storyline where the protagonist appears in opposition to others and is overthrown. In "happily-ever-after" stories, the progressive narrative is followed by a happy ending.

After identifying the basic structure of the story and following the procedure regarding storylines proposed by Gergen and Gergen (1988), we focused on how the child and parent were positioned by the narrator (see Table 1). We adopted Bamberg's (2020) system of three dimensions for positioning the self and others in narratives: sameness/difference, agency/passivity, and continuity/change. First, we determined whether the child and the parent were positioned on the basis of sameness or difference. Second, we focused on agency versus passivity by seeing what possibilities, if any, the child had to exercise agency: for example, did they resist the parent, or have no alternative but to comply? Third, we examined whether the positioning of the child and the parent changed during the conflict. We also considered how the characters were gendered and whether the story types differed in this respect.

Table 1. *Story Types, Course of the Conflict, and the Position and Power of the Child and Parent*

Story type (no. of stories)	Parties involved (no. of stories)	Course of conflict	Child's position	Parent's position	Child–parent power relation
Mediation and compromise (19)	Girl–mother (8) Girl–father (3) Boy–mother (5) Boy–father (3)	The child may resist, but the conflict also includes negotiation, compromise, and accommodation from both parties. Conflict ends through co-determination.	From negotiator to compromiser	From negotiator to compromiser and reasoner	Power is negotiated and shared between child and parent.
Surrender (16)	Girl–mother (8) Girl–father (3) Boy–mother (1) Boy–father (4)	The child resists but has to comply with the parent's demands. Sometimes the child gives in unwillingly and sometimes willingly. Conflict ends favoring the parent.	From complier to reconciler and mind-changer	From ignorer to threatener	The parent has power over the child.
Persistence (12)	Girl–mother (12)	The child resists unyieldingly and acts tactically. Conflict ends favoring the child.	From unyielding to tactician	Mind-changer	The balance of power shifts but the girl momentarily has power over the mother.
Solidarity (7)	Girl–mother (4) Boy–mother (1) Boy–father (2)	The child resists but has to comply with the parent's demands. The child takes responsibility for the parent's feelings. Conflict ends favoring the parent.	From complier to solidaristic	Ignorer	The parent has power over the child but the power relation is also blurred.
Standoff (7)	Girl–father (3) Boy–mother (1) Boy–father (3)	The child resists, refusing to yield or to comply with the parent's demands. Conflict ends in a standoff.	Unyielding	Unyielding	The child and the parent both struggle to have power over the other.

After identifying the plot structure and how the child and parent were positioned, individual stories were compared, scrutinized for differences and similarities, and grouped into suitable categories to form story types. Through this process, five story types were identified (see Table 1): (a) mediation and compromise stories (comedy), (b) surrender stories (tragedy), (c) persistence stories (heroic saga), (d) solidarity stories (romanticized tragedy), and (e) standoff stories (stable).

Findings

Of the girls' 61 stories, 15 involved viewing a tablet, 13 putting away toys, 12 brushing teeth, 12 buying a toy in a supermarket, 7 eating, and 2 going to a daycare center. In 40 stories, the conflict was between child and mother, and in 21 it was between child and father. Thus, stories about child–mother conflicts occurred almost twice as often as those about child–father conflicts. In 41 stories, the child character was described as a girl, and in 20 as a boy. Some of the narrators stated that they chose a girl character because they were girls themselves, or a boy because the child in the picture card looked like a boy to them.

Each story began with a description of a conflict caused by incompatibility between the child's and the parent's goals. The story types — mediation and compromise, surrender, persistence, solidarity, and standoff — are presented separately below, and are described in Table 1. Each is preceded by a description of the picture chosen by the child and an excerpt from the transcript that illuminates the plot of the story and how the child and parent are positioned. To condense the excerpts, all fillers such as "well" and "um" have been removed.

Mediation and Compromise Stories

The Child Wants to Continue Viewing the Tablet (Rosa, 6)

> Researcher: What do you think, what might happen in this picture?
> Rosa: That girl secretly took the tablet but then her mother comes and says, "Now is not the time to play with the tablet."
> Researcher: How might the mother feel?
> Rosa: Maybe the mother gets a little angry because the girl secretly took out the tablet.
> Researcher: The mother gets a little angry. How about the girl?
> Rosa: [pondering] I think the girl is embarrassed.
> Researcher: What do you think they might say to each other in your story?
> Rosa: The mother says, "You should go and do something else", and then the girl says, "Can I play this game to the end?"
> Researcher: What might the mother answer?
> Rosa: The mother says, "Okay, but then you need to put the tablet away." Then the girl invents some fun play.
> Researcher: How do you think the girl feels now?
> Rosa: Happy.
> Researcher: How about the mother?
> Rosa: Just happy after that.

The majority of the stories were of the mediation and compromise types, where a progressive storyline dominates after the child character's initial challenges to parental authority are resolved by child and parent together. The storyline proceeds as a comedy, without many problems, before coming to a happy end (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). A slightly larger proportion of the mediation

and compromise stories were narrated between child and mother characters than between child and father characters.

In the mediation and compromise stories, the child was narrated as occasionally resisting the parent, but the described conflict also included negotiation, compromise, and accommodative initiatives from both parties. This is shown in Rosa's story, in which the child was narrated as secretly taking out the tablet and thereby breaking a rule agreed upon together or set by the parent. This was narrated as embarrassing the child and slightly angering the mother. However, despite the initial challenges in this story type, the child and parent were always narrated as reaching a mutually agreed solution. This came to the fore in Rosa's story, in which the child was described as showing initiative by negotiating with her mother. By asking permission to complete the game against her mother's wishes, the child was described as proposing a compromise to which the mother accedes. Thus, in this story type, the child's attempts to negotiate were answered and the child was listened to and considered (Bjerke, 2011; Lundy, 2007). In some stories, the child was described as agreeing with the parent after listening to sufficiently convincing parental reasoning. This can be interpreted as evidence of the child positioning the parent as an authority whose opinion merits consideration. Therefore, in the mediation and compromise stories, the child was positioned as a negotiator and compromiser, and the parent as a negotiator, compromiser, and justifier.

In the mediation and compromise stories, the initial negative tone turned into joy and happiness as power was shared between child and parent. The consent and adjustment of both parties was required to reach a compromise and hence conflicts were seen as a site for negotiation and shared decision-making (e.g., Bjerke, 2011). This story type can, therefore, be interpreted as highlighting the shift in families towards a culture of equality in the positioning of family members (Leonard, 2016; Sevón, 2015). Even if the generational order was clearly present in the girls' stories, parental power and control were also resisted and negotiated in child–parent conflicts.

Surrender Stories

The Child Does Not Want to Put the Toys Away (Lara, 6)

> Researcher: Could you tell me what might happen in this picture?
>
> Lara: The father says, "The toys need to be put away", and the girl says, "I want to play."
>
> Researcher: How might the girl feel when her father says, "The toys need to be put away"?
>
> Lara: [looks at the emotion cards and shows emotion card expressing anger]
>
> Researcher: The girl is angry. What might her father be feeling? Can you find one?
>
> Lara: Similar.
>
> Researcher: When I think about it, they're in this tricky situation. Both are in a bad mood, and the father looked angry when the girl said: "I want to play." Would either one say something?

> Lara: [pondering] The father says angrily: "No more playing!"
> Researcher: What about the girl, what might she say to the father?
> Lara: No, she doesn't say anything. She starts putting away the toys.
> Researcher: What do you think, what mood is her father in when she starts putting the toys away, does his mood change or not?
> Lara: [looks at the emotion cards and shows emotion card expressing joy]
> Researcher: The father is happy now. How about the girl?
> Lara: She's still angry.

The surrender story, where the storyline was reminiscent of tragedy (Gergen & Gergen, 1988), was the second most common type. The child was narrated as being in opposition to the parent and unable to overcome the obstacles preventing her desired outcome. The storyline was regressive; most commonly the ending was represented as unhappy and unfavorable for the child character and favorable for the parent character. A larger proportion of the surrender stories were narrated between child and father characters than between child and mother characters.

In the surrender stories, the child was described as resisting the parent and sometimes also as expressing dissenting views in a subtle way, as in Lara's story, in which the child was narrated as voicing her desire to continue playing. However, the parent was always narrated as ignoring the child's opinions and responding by angrily commanding the child to obey. Sometimes, to get the child to obey and resume behaving acceptably, the parent was described as threatening to withhold important privileges from the child, such as access to an amusement park. In this story type, the child was narrated as giving in to the parent's demands, an ending which was described as arousing sorrow and anger in the child. In Lara's story, feelings of anger were described as remaining after the conflict was over. This can be interpreted as an expression of agency, despite the absence of action (Kuczynski, 2003). In this sense, this story type describes a child who was able to utilize her agentic capabilities privately, beyond the reach of parental power (see Kuczynski et al., 2018). In a few stories, the child was described as conciliatory and the child's compliance as a change of mind, and thus in these cases the child was deemed to be acting on their own volition. This can be seen as a subtle and creative way to perform agency (Corsaro, 2018; Kuczynski, 2003; Rainio, 2008) and as a desire to maintain agency within the lower and devalued position reserved for children in the generational order (see Alanen, 2009). Thus, in the surrender stories, the child was positioned as a complier, reconciler, and mind-changer, and the parent as an ignorer and threatener.

The surrender stories described the child character's lack of choice in responding to parental demands and depicted the parent as ignoring the child's views and attempts to join in the decision-making process (cf. Bjerke, 2011). The parent was positioned as the sole decision-maker. However, these stories revealed that the child characters were not wholly passive in the face of parental power but were also able to creatively interpret conflicts and construct possibilities for their own agency (Corsaro, 2018; Sevón, 2015). Therefore, the surrender stories can be interpreted as highlighting children's active attempts to reposition themselves as actors with the power to

influence things meaningful to them. In this way, the child is able to maintain a sense of agency in child–parent conflicts, even though the parent has power over the child.

Persistence Stories

The Child Wants to Buy a Toy in the Supermarket (Ira, 6)

> Researcher: Have you got an idea what could happen in this picture?
> Ira: This girl and mother went to the supermarket and the girl says, "Can I have a toy?"
> Researcher: What might the mother say?
> Ira: [pondering] The mother says, "No toys this time, let's buy one another time."
> Researcher: The mother thinks no toys this time. What might this girl say to her mother?
> Ira: "I'd like that toy — will you buy it?" Then, while her mother was shopping, the girl suddenly slipped it into the trolley. Then her mother was in a good mood: "Okay, let's buy that toy."
> Researcher: I wonder why her mother let her buy that toy, even though she said no at first?
> Ira: Her mother had to buy the toy, guess why? Because her mother can't listen to this whining, this girl whines all the time. So, her mother let her buy the toy.
> Researcher: What might her mother say to this girl?
> Ira: "Okay then. You can buy that toy, but this is the last time you buy a toy."
> Researcher: How does her mother feel when she buys it?
> Ira: The mother is happy.
> Researcher: How about the girl?
> Ira: She's also in a good mood now she's got the toy.

In Gergen and Gergen's (1988) narrative procedure, the storyline of persistence stories resembles that of the heroic saga, as it takes a progressive turn after several progressive–regressive phases. This story type, in which the child character emerges as the hero, can be interpreted as a story about the attainment of the child character's goal. The end was typically represented as happy and satisfactory for both parties, for both the girl and mother characters, the dyad in all of the persistence stories.

In the persistence stories, the child was narrated as resisting the parent unyieldingly and acting tactically while also being aware of the hierarchical difference between child and adult. This was exemplified in Ira's story, in which the girl was first narrated as asking her mother for permission to buy a toy. When the mother refused to buy the toy, the girl was described as secretly slipping it into the shopping basket. By demanding and secretly resisting (i.e., through secondary adjustment; Corsaro, 2018), to which the mother adapts herself, the girl was narrated as being able to achieve her goal. Therefore, in the persistence stories, through imaginative and tactical strategies and the mother's change of mind, the child was able to take advantage of the possibilities offered by the situation to bring about change. This can be interpreted as evidence of a child's capacity to

influence the mother in a conflict situation (Kuczynski, 2003; Moran-Ellis, 2013). Thus, in this story type, the child was positioned as unyielding and as a tactician, and the mother as a mind-changer.

The girls' persistence stories showed that the relative power positions of a girl and her mother are not immutable but are constantly constructed and negotiated in reciprocal child–parent relations (Leonard, 2016). This story type also transcends the traditional and narrow stereotypical gender role expectations regarding girls, revealing that, at least in girl–mother conflict stories, girls can be dominant, independent, and uncooperative (e.g., Hourigan, 2021; Koenig, 2018; Williams & Best, 1990). Although the mother was described as having the power to set the rules, the girl was narrated as being able to resist her mother's power. In this story type, by creating different strategies to challenge parental demands, the girl was able to reconstruct the asymmetrical power relations in the generational order and to contribute to changing rules and practices (Corsaro, 2018; Leonard, 2016). Thus, the girls' narrated actions in these stories can be interpreted as their active attempts to momentarily blur or even reverse the traditional understanding of power.

Solidarity Stories

The Child Wants to Continue Viewing the Tablet (Eea, 4)

> Researcher: This was your favorite picture. Who do you think are in this picture?
> Eea: [pondering] A father and a boy.
> Researcher: What do you think the boy is doing in this picture?
> Eea: He is playing with the tablet.
> Researcher: He is playing with the tablet. Could either one say something in your story?
> Eea: The father says, "You can't play any more; the battery might run down."
> Researcher: How does the boy feel about that?
> Eea: [looks at the emotion cards and shows the cards expressing fear and anger]
> Researcher: How do you think the father feels?
> Eea: He is angry.
> Researcher: What makes the father most angry now?
> Eea: The father is angry because the boy started crying when he was forbidden to play.
> Researcher: Okay. What might happen next?
> Eea: [pondering] Now the boy feels happy, and he gives his father flowers from the garden, then his father feels happy.
> Researcher: Why was the boy in a happy mood?
> Eea: Because his father was in a happy mood.

In the solidarity stories, the storyline resembles that of romanticized tragedy, as it takes a slight progressive turn after the regressive phase (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). The feelings of happiness at the end were represented as satisfactory for both the child and parent characters. In this story type,

a slightly larger proportion of the stories was narrated between child and mother characters than between child and father characters.

In the solidarity stories, the child was described as resisting the parent but nevertheless having to comply with the parent's demands. This was evident in Eea's story, where the child was narrated as being forbidden to play with the tablet, causing him to feel fear and anger. However, the parent was never narrated as paying attention to the child's wishes and feelings. The child, instead of being described as continuing to pursue his own goal, was narrated as constructing both the solution to the conflict and maintaining intergenerational ties through solidarity with his parent. The child was positioned as taking responsibility for the parent's feelings (see Notko & Sevón, 2018). Sometimes compliance was described by strategic actions, as in Eea's story, where the boy gave his father flowers to put his father into a good mood. Thus, in this story type, the child's possibilities for agency were manifested through actions aimed at making the parent feel better. In the solidarity stories, the child was positioned as compliant and solidaristic and the parent as an ignorer.

In the present solidarity stories, children felt the need to initiate actions and take responsibility for their parent's emotional state. In this context, although the child–parent relation was narrated as hierarchical, the boundary between child and parent was somewhat blurred through the child's strategic actions. These stories were also in line with the cultural discourse of the "good" (i.e., obedient) child, and how a child should behave when positioned in this way. Thus, in this story type, the child followed the cultural script regarding appropriate behavior, including in conflict situations (see Sevón, 2015), which offered the girl narrators an opportunity to correct the disharmonious and unstable child–parent relation before ending the story (Nicolopoulou, 2011). However, from the perspective of power and dependence, it may be that opportunities for a shift in the dynamics of agency and power in child–parent conflicts open up when a child adopts, embraces, and implements acts of solidarity.

Standoff Stories

The Child Doesn't Want to Go to the Daycare Centre (Elsa, 4)

> Researcher: What do you think, what might happen in this picture?
> Elsa: That boy doesn't want to go to kindergarten even when his mother asks him to.
> Researcher: The boy doesn't want to go to kindergarten. What do you think, why not?
> Elsa: Maybe because he doesn't like it there.
> Researcher: That may be the reason. How do you think the boy feels?
> Elsa: I think he is happy because he doesn't want to go to kindergarten.
> Researcher: How might his mother feel?
> Elsa: [looks at the emotion cards and shows the card expressing astonishment]
> Researcher: What is his mother wondering about?
> Elsa: Probably why he's not going to kindergarten.
> Researcher: Could his mother say something to him?

> Elsa: Maybe, if she says "Come along!" and the boy says, "I'm not coming!", then the mother will probably be angry.
>
> Researcher: The mother has asked the boy to come twice. What might happen now?
>
> Elsa: [pondering] I don't know.

In the standoff stories, the situation relative to the parties' goals remained unchanged (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) and thus the plot of the story did not progress from the starting point. Both the child and parent characters were narrated as wanting different things and being unable to resolve the problem. Thus, a stable storyline was constructed. All but one of the standoff stories were narrated between child and father characters.

In this story type, the child was narrated as refusing to yield or comply with parental demands. If either party was described as showing a willingness to negotiate, the other did not respond to this. Moreover, even when the child was narrated as using different strategies to resist the parent, or the parent as using different strategies to get the child to comply, neither party was able to initiate change. Thus, in the standoff stories, child and parent were narrated as equals, as highlighted in Elsa's story. Typically, in this story type, both the child and parent were positioned as unyielding.

In Elsa's story, as in all the other standoff stories, the narrator did not offer a resolution (Labov, 1976) without the researcher asking how the conflict could be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties (Koivula et al., 2020). The fact that the characters in the standoff stories remained in conflict can also be explained the narrator's inability to devise a satisfactory narrative structure for ending a story where both the child and the parent (most commonly the father) are positioned as relentlessly struggling to achieve their goals. Although the child gained agency by open resistance to the parent, the child–parent relation can be interpreted as indicating a symmetrical power relation, in which neither party has power over the other (cf. Recchia et al., 2010; Sorbring, 2009).

Discussion

This study investigated what story types can be found in young girls' fictional narratives about child–parent conflicts. The focus was on how the girl narrators positioned the child and the parent from the perspective of agency and power in different story types, and on the role of gender in each. We identified five different types: mediation and compromise stories, surrender stories, persistence stories, solidarity stories, and standoff stories. These story types can be understood as representing the girls' ways of constructing reality and making sense of child–parent conflicts (e.g., Engel, 2005; Nicolopoulou, 2011). They also illustrate how young children are able to exercise agency within the generational order and what resources they are able to draw on to support their agentic efforts in conflicts (see Moran-Ellis, 2013).

The girls' stories demonstrate that diverse narrative structures are available to children in making sense of conflicts between children and parents. The most common story type in this study,

mediation and compromise, narrated situations where power was shared between child and parent; thus the child's agency was practised through negotiating, making compromises, and engaging in decision-making. In this story type, the children were acknowledged as rights holders who were able to express their views and have their views taken into consideration (see United Nations, 1989). This story type also reflects the ongoing shift towards more equal child–parent relations (Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016; Sevón, 2015) in which parents are open to being influenced by their children's views (Lundy, 2007). The children in the mediation and compromise stories were also offered opportunities to act responsibly (Leonard, 2016), highlighting that conflicts can provide important opportunities for children to learn social rules, practise navigating social relations, and express their agency in a socially competent way (e.g., Della Porta et al., 2019; Kuczynski, 2003).

In both the surrender and solidarity stories, the parent was narrated as maintaining the hierarchical generational order and exercising power over the child, who had no choice but to comply with the parent's demands. Although their agency was narrated as suppressed, these children were nevertheless able to exercise agency in a variety of ways (e.g., Leonard, 2016) despite not being able to achieve their goals in the conflicts. On the one hand, these children were narrated as being able to hold on to their feelings of anger despite complying with their parents' demands. Further, some girls also described the child characters as changing their mind and complying of their own volition, and thus the child's agency was manifested as creativity in interpretation (Corsaro, 2018). The child's agentic position in child–parent conflicts was maintained in creative ways, even if it was not always presented as action or realized verbally (see Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 2018). On the other hand, by exhibiting solidarity, these child characters were narrated as wanting to please the parent rather than trying to achieve their own goals in conflicts. This reveals that even young children can have the ability to read a parent's emotions, control their own emotions, and modify their behavior to restore harmony in cases of child–parent conflict (see Notko & Sevón, 2018). Thus, these story types reflect the girl narrators' understanding of the intergenerational hierarchy and the child's lesser position in the generational order, as enshrined not only in the traditional expectations of children's obedience towards parents (e.g., Hungerland, 2016), but also the position of young children as development actors with limited agentic possibilities (Moran-Ellis, 2013).

In the persistence and the standoff stories, the child's agency was narrated as becoming visible through unyielding resistance to parental authority. In the former story type, power in the child–parent relation was narrated as shifting, and the child was described as momentarily having power over the parent. This story type exemplified how a child was able to instigate change, redefine the rules, and reconstruct the child–parent power relation through persistence and strategic action (see Corsaro, 2018). It also demonstrated young children's capability to act purposively, strategically, and effectively (Moran-Ellis, 2013), and thus influence the structures and the relations that surround them (Leonard, 2016). In the standoff story type, the child and parent were narrated as struggling for power. The conflict remained unresolved, and thus the story ended without closure,

as if the girls lacked the kinds of narrative structures needed for a solution in a situation where neither party is willing to compromise. Both these story types challenge the notions of the immutability of asymmetrical child–parent relations and the traditional generational order, in which parents have exclusive power over their children. These story types thus emphasize that the positions of child and parent within the generational order are not unchangeable but are fluid over time (Leonard, 2016).

Of particular interest in the stories was the meaningful role played by gender in the girls' understanding of a child's agentic possibilities in child–parent conflicts. Only in girl–mother conflicts, as highlighted in the persistence stories, was the girl character positioned as a powerful child — a hero — who momentarily blurred and reversed the traditional generational order. Thus, only girls were accorded a momentary dominant position in these conflicts. Contrary to stereotypical expectations of girls' agency, the girls who participated in this study did not describe girl characters as solely communal, caring, and empathetic, but also described them as autonomous, uncooperative, and dominant individuals who possessed power, agency, and privilege (e.g., Hourigan, 2021; Klaczynski et al., 2020; Koenig, 2018; Kollmayer et al., 2018). By contrast, in story types other than persistence, the protagonist could be narrated as either a boy or a girl, and the protagonist roles were presented similarly in either case.

Moreover, in the girls' stories, power was more often negotiated with the mother and the child was more often able to influence the resolution in child–mother than in child–father dyads. That is, in the fictional child–parent conflicts the mother characters were described as engaging in democratic power relations more often than fathers, while almost all the unresolved conflicts were narrated as taking place between child and father. This means that, in the girls' stories, the child and the father were not described solely in terms of inequality or asymmetry but were also positioned as equal actors in the generational order. However, mothers appeared to be more sensitive than fathers in listening to the child and making compromises, thereby supporting the realization of the child's right to be heard and considered (Lundy, 2007; United Nations, 1989). This prompts the question of whether the girls were constructing conflict stories that followed an "ideal" and desired pattern from the child's perspective — that is, conflicts in which the mother listens to the child and values the child's views — or whether they regarded the mother in their stories as a parent who values her child's agency, and perceives her child's resistance through an agentic lens rather than seeing it as stubbornness and unacceptable behavior (see Kuczynski et al., 2018). Interestingly, the parents in the girls' stories were not described as responding differently to daughters and sons (cf. Morawska, 2020; Morrow, 2006; Sorbring, 2009).

It is important to acknowledge that this study has certain methodological limitations. Because the culturally and socially situated narratives were inevitably produced in collaboration between the child and the first author, the position of the author as a co-creator cannot be ignored (Riessman, 2008). However, the researcher was careful not to lead the girls' storytelling in any particular direction and instead focused on ensuring that the storylines, and the actions taken by the characters, were as far as possible the child's own. Although the children were told that all kinds

of stories are welcome and important, the adult researcher's more powerful role in relation to the child must nevertheless be recognized as children tend to say what they think the adult researcher wants to hear (Palaiologou, 2017). In this study, this ethical challenge was met by using the SMPT method, which has the particular strength that children are not asked to tell stories directly related to their own experiences, but to create imaginary stories based on characters depicted in drawings.

The SMPT method produced diverse material, which was reflected in both the structure and the content of the stories. Although some of the girls' stories were firmly structured and coherent, the girls also produced stories that were complex, incoherent, and loosely structured. Therefore, the participants did not, unlike those studied by Nicolopoulou (2011), structure their stories just around harmonious and stable child–parent relations. Some of the girls' stories were marked by disruption and social disorder, and some were left unresolved (cf. Nicolopoulou, 2011). It is also important to note that the stories are not to be considered as representing the children's real-life experiences. Instead, they can be seen as offering insights into the ways in which young girls understand and interpret child–parent conflicts in the specific sociocultural and situational context in which they live (Riessman, 2008). In this regard, however, it needs to be acknowledged that during the past few decades a shift away from hierarchical child–parent relations to more negotiated ones has taken place in Western countries, where children's rights are well established compared to many other countries (e.g., Hungerland, 2016; Pells, 2012). The reliability and credibility of this study is enhanced by researcher triangulation (Patton, 2015), the fact that each story could be identified as belonging to a specific story type, and that children and parents were also positioned according to story type. Moreover, the quotations from the data enable readers to evaluate the trustworthiness of our interpretations. In the future, to widen our understanding of the role of gender in child–parent conflicts, the narratives of young boys should also be investigated. Young children's narratives of unresolved conflicts could also be further researched.

Conclusion

This study highlights the heterogeneity of young girls' narratives of fictional child–parent conflicts. While the girls' stories confirm the existing structural position of children, they also show that children have several possible means of exercising agency and influencing the power relations within the prevailing generational order. Moreover, the girls' stories challenge the simplistic idea of child–parent conflict as a power struggle between parent and child over disobedience, and instead demonstrate that conflicts also furnish both parties with opportunities for negotiation, compromise, and reconciliation. Nevertheless, a relatively large proportion of the stories highlighted parental control and power over the child, suggesting that child–parent relations based on authoritarianism have not been completely replaced by more democratic relations.

This study has practical implications both for the well-being of young girls and the position of children in families and society at large. The girls' stories suggest that adults need to be sensitive and open to children's different ways of expressing themselves and participating in negotiations

concerning matters that affect them (Lundy, 2007). It is thus harmful to assume that girls exercise their agency narrowly according to stereotypical expectations of gender by being passive, nurturing, and dependent (e.g., Greene & Nixon, 2020; Klaczynski et al., 2020). Instead, girls' agency needs to be considered from a multidimensional perspective that transcends stereotypical gender boundaries. To empower children's agency, their ways of expressing themselves, including resistance, should be seen as manifestations of their agency and not as "bad behavior". Like van der Kapp-Deeder et al. (2017), we believe that as long as children's agency remains suppressed, children's rights as laid down in the UNCRC will not be realized, and their overall well-being will be impaired.

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Appendix

The Pictures Used in Story Magician's Play Time
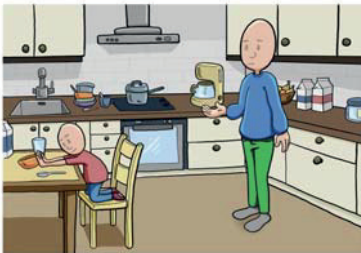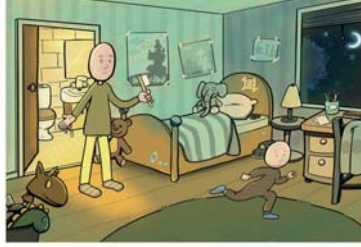
III

REBELLIOUS BOYS AND CARING GIRLS? YOUNG CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES OF CHILD AGENCY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFLUENCE IN CHILD–PARENT CONFLICTS

by

Lahtinen, M., Sevón, E., & Böök, M. L. 2024

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