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Clara Iversen

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Clara Iversen

Uppsala University, Sweden

Abstract

This article examines how ideals of children's participation and model consistency compete in social workers' accounts of intervention outcomes in 35 evaluation interviews in Sweden. Using discursive psychology, the analysis demonstrates how the social workers rely on category-based accounts: They describe willing children as competent, unwilling children as developing, and children attempting to rule in counselling as problematic. The interviews' focus on following the intervention model constructs a limited, predetermined participation that only respects children's wishes when they agree with the intervention. In showing this, the study contributes to further understanding of tensions between the principle and practice of participation.

Keywords

Account analysis, children, membership categorization analysis, model consistency, participation, social workers

In recent years, researchers interested in childhood as a socially situated phenomenon have focused on how changes in institutional practices constrain and enable children's agency. Two major changes in approach have affected social welfare responses to children and the evaluation of those interventions over the past decade. One is an increased emphasis on children's participation and a corresponding effort to develop child-centred working methods (e.g. Eriksson, 2012; Eriksson and Näsman, 2008; Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010; Pinkney, 2011; Van Nijnatten and Jongen, 2011). The other is a move towards increased specification of programme theory and monitoring of the consistency in the delivery of interventions (e.g. Naleppa and Cagle, 2010; Zvoch, 2009). Although

Corresponding author:

Clara Iversen, Department of Sociology, Uppsala University, Thunbergsvägen 3H, Box 624, Uppsala, 751 26, Sweden.

Email: clara.iversen@soc.uu.se

these changes share the ideal of service users' right to interventions that work, the present article argues that they can also conflict with each other: The focus on model consistency may limit children's ability to participate in decisions about the intervention.

This argument is based on an analysis of how intervention outcomes are accounted for in a specific institutional setting: interviews with social workers conducted as a part of a national Swedish evaluation study of interventions for children exposed to violence against their mothers. The national study focused on interventions designed to help children who had witnessed violence against their mothers. Thus the social workers discussed here act as counsellors or support persons, and not as case workers in child protection cases. In the evaluation interviews, the social workers were asked if a support or counselling intervention was right for particular children and to account for their answer. My analysis interprets the social workers' accounts as justifications of or excuses for their professional actions (Scott and Lyman, 1968). I find that in justifying or excusing their actions, social workers, in collaboration with the interviewer, implicitly categorize children in ways that constrain children's agency: Children who wish to influence the counselling process risk being constructed as incompetent. This analysis contributes to research on discursive conditions for children in institutional practices (cf. Hepburn and Wiggins, 2007; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998), and specifically how research methods in social work encourage and suppress children's participation.

To situate the study, I start out by briefly describing research on children's participation and model consistency in social work. The next section presents the data and analytical framework: I use discursive psychology (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2007) and analysis of accounts (Scott and Lyman, 1968) to study in detail how categorical knowledge is invoked in the interview interaction. After this, I demonstrate the analysis with examples from interviews representing three different ways that social workers account for outcomes. In the last section, I discuss these accounts in relation to participation and model consistency. I conclude that although social workers sometimes invoke the category of the competent, participating child, they also construct children as troublesome if they try to make decisions about how the counselling will proceed. Despite the ideal of child participation in the counselling process, these categorization practices imply that children's participation, as constructed in the interviews, is predetermined and only considered valid when children want to do what the intervention model advises.

Children's participation and research-based social work

Social studies of childhood have explored how social institutions encourage or suppress children's participation in various settings such as helpline calls, investigation processes, counselling, and research interviews (Butler et al., 2010; Eriksson, 2012; Hutchby, 2002; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; Iversen, 2012; Iversen, in press). Internationally and in Sweden, researchers have criticized institutional practices for reifying asymmetries between the professional adult and the child service-user and for relying on theories that do not appreciate children's agency (Eriksson, 2009; Kenkel and Couling, 2006; Qvortrup, 1994). For example, children's resistance to constraints in institutional interaction has often been interpreted as communicative deficiency (Silverman, 1987). Moreover, in child counselling, initial resistance is viewed as a natural trait of young

service users (e.g. Geldard and Geldard, 1997). Avoidance of painful memories is considered a symptom of trauma, and many intervention models are based on the idea that children are generally unwilling to participate in counselling (e.g. motivational interviewing; see Hendersen and Thompson, 2011).

Many welfare institutions have responded to this critique by working to develop child-friendly interventions and methods of circumventing the conflict between the ideal of participation and the institutional agenda of changing children's behaviour (Butler et al., 2010; Hutchby, 2005a). However, studies have shown that there is still a gap between the principle and practice of participation (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010; Hutchby, 2005b). Van Nijnatten and Jongen (2011), for example, have shown that social workers in divorce-related inquiries are unclear about what they expect from children, which makes it difficult for children to voice their views. Today's child service users have to prove their competence if they are to have a say in matters concerning their own lives (see Eriksson, 2012; McDonald, 2009; Pinkney, 2011). By contrast, Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) argue that genuine participation requires social workers to recognize children's particular needs and rights and draw on that awareness to encourage their involvement in decision-making.

As a solution to inadequate social work practice, many actors – including service-user organizations and social workers – call for evaluations of interventions (Munro, 2004; Naleppa and Cagle, 2010). To compare interventions, evaluators attend to how interventions are intended to be carried out and how they are actually delivered (Tucker and Blythe, 2008). It is not necessarily inappropriate for social workers to stray from the original intervention model; indeed, deviating from the model can often benefit the child (Naleppa and Cagle, 2010), and deviation from intervention models is more likely when the professional is highly skilled or when contextual factors indicate a need for flexibility (Miller and Binder, 2002; Zvoch, 2009). However, for evaluators to examine what components of an intervention model are working for specific children, it is important for models to be delivered in a consistent way (Tucker and Blythe, 2008).

The present study adds to an understanding of the conditions that children face when participating as social actors in different contexts (cf. Hutchby, 2005a; James et al., 1998; Pinkney, 2011). Although the study does not explore interactions in which children themselves participate, it contributes to an understanding of the tension between institutions' emancipatory potential and power practices. By interpreting accounts as justifications, which question a moral order, or excuses, which reinforce a moral order (Scott and Lyman, 1968), the analysis shows how social workers' accounts reproduce a particular moral order of participation. In this moral order, children's wishes are only important if they comply with the intervention model.

Data and analytical framework

The evaluation interviews that this study analyzes were conducted as part of a national Swedish evaluation of support interventions for children exposed to violence against their mothers (Broberg et al., 2011).¹ The evaluation study mainly used psychometric measures of children's and mothers' well-being before and after the intervention; the interactional features of these measures are analysed elsewhere (Iversen, 2012). The

interviews with social workers that the current article analyses were included in the evaluation study to provide information on how social workers' assessments of intervention outcomes interacted with the data in general. Six interviewers, of whom I was one, conducted approximately 250 interviews with social workers, but I was the only interviewer who audio-recorded the interviews. The present study focuses on 35 of these audio-recorded interviews with eight social workers working in three of the evaluated agencies (from a total of 15 agencies).

The interviews concern children between 3 and 13 years of age who had been offered either an individual or a group-based intervention. The individual counselling model, called *The Stairs*, is Sweden's most commonly used model for supporting children exposed to domestic violence. It runs between four and 10 sessions, with fewer sessions for younger children. *The Stairs* is based on trauma theory and aims to guide children to reconstruct violent events in a safe environment with a trained adult, so that children can organize their feelings and gain hope (Arnell and Ekbohm, 1999). The other intervention is based on a pedagogical group model inspired by *Children Are People Too (CAP)* (Hawthorne, 1990). In this model, six to eight children and two adults meet weekly 10–15 times to talk about themes related to domestic violence. The goal with the CAP-inspired groups is to enable children to understand their experiences, develop strategies to deal with their life situations, and avoid feelings of stigmatization by meeting other children who share similar experiences.

In the study, the interviewer asked the social worker to account for the outcome of a given intervention; that is, to state whether the intervention was right for the child and to explain why it was or was not. When people are asked for an account, they are treated as moral actors who are responsible for their actions (see Juhila et al., 2010; Sterponi, 2009). In this sense, accounts depend on a normative moral order; we appear as credible subjects when we give reasonable accounts for our actions (Goffman, 1972: 34). Scott and Lyman (1968) suggest that accounts can either excuse or justify behaviours. When using excuses, speakers deny full responsibility for their actions but accept the moral order that is required for the action to be questioned. When using justifications, speakers assume responsibility for their actions but question the underlying moral order. The present study applies this reasoning to social workers' accounts: Their excuses demonstrate the reproduction of a moral order, while their justifications represent resistance to a moral order.

The analysis draws on discursive psychology and the idea that 'discourse is the central medium for action, psychology and understanding' (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2007: 1). Discursive psychology, influenced by membership categorization analysis, offers a way to study categories and cultural knowledge in action; that is, categories' implications, scope, and flexibility in different settings (Edwards, 1991; Stokoe, 2012). Because categories are linked to norms, specific activities and characteristics (Sacks, 1972: 335), people accomplish social actions – such as complementing, persuading, or accusing – by invoking these categories in interaction (Eglin and Hester, 1992). This study uses membership categorization analysis to show how, in a high-stakes setting created specifically for social workers to account for their professional action, the interview participants construct different categories of children with different levels of agency. The interview interaction is a discursive practice that concerns children, even though it is not causally

linked to social workers' professional responses to children. Because my aim is to offer insight into the production of agency in this particular institutional setting, I focus specifically on accounts that employ the psychologically implicative concepts of willingness and wishes (see Edwards, 2008). I have transcribed the excerpts using the conventions developed by Jefferson (2004; see Appendix).

Categorizing children in accounts of intervention outcomes

This section uses interview excerpts to illustrate three different categories of children that social workers' accounts constructed: the willing child, the developing child, and the ruling child. Throughout the interviews, the interviewer (IR) and the social worker (SW) collaboratively provided two reasons that an intervention had a positive outcome: that the child wanted to participate, and that the child had developed. In the 35 interviews, the outcome was described as negative only in relation to two children. In both cases, the reason stated was that the children made decisions about the intervention in opposition to the social worker's advice. Because the accounts of developing and ruling children never invoked the category of the competent child, I argue that the evaluation interviews constructed an order of predetermined participation.

Willing children

In many accounts, participants connected a positive intervention outcome to the child's willingness to participate. Uniformly, these accounts involved displays of the child's competence. The first excerpt² shows how the social worker accounted for the individual counselling model (The Stairs) as right for six-year-old Emma by describing her as willing to come to the agency:

- 1 IR was the counselling the right intervention
 2 for Emma then?
 3 (1.0)
 4 SW I think it was good for her,
 5 IR mm,
 6 (4.0)
 7 IR in what way then?
 8 SW well I felt like (1.0) she thought th^{at}at (.)
 9 it was good to come talk- she talked
 10 willingly,
 11 (.)
 12 SW and I felt like she thought it was pretty
 13 good to get a chance to talk about the
 14 things that we did=
 15 IR =mm
 16 (2.0)
 17 IR did you feel like she wanted to come?
 18 SW yes I felt like she wanted to come.
 19 (2.0)

20 IR did she [say]
 21 SW [abs]olutely she was happy and
 22 positive when she came in here and
 23 wanted- (.) ran in here quickly and
 24 got started and (1.7) it was never a
 25 challenge she knew what we were gonna
 26 do as soon as we entered the room.

In this excerpt, the social worker presents the intervention as right for Emma through several turns in the interview interaction. The interviewer's question 'in what way then' (line 7) invites the social worker to account for her initial subjective assessment (line 4), thereby treating this assessment as an insufficient answer. The social worker starts with the subjective 'I felt like' and goes on to describe how Emma 'talked willingly' (lines 8–10). Going along with this subjective stance, the interviewer's yes/no question (line 17) brings up Emma's wishes. After receiving an aligning answer (line 18), the interviewer asks, 'did she say' (line 20), thereby providing information as to what would constitute a proper answer to her question in line 7. The social worker comes in early with 'absolutely' and accounts for this answer with several category-tied predicates displaying Emma as 'happy and positive' upon arrival, as someone who quickly 'got started', for whom it was 'never a challenge' to start talking, and furthermore, who 'knew what we were gonna do' when she came into the room (lines 21–26). These characteristics construct Emma as active and competent.

The category of the willing child also appears in the next excerpt. Here, nine-year-old Robin wishes to continue individual counselling with the interviewee's co-worker Christine after the group intervention has finished, and the social worker and interviewer treat this desire as evidence for the success of the intervention. We enter the interview when the social worker has already described the intervention as good for Robin, and here, she accounts for this conclusion:

1 SW he can say that he needs to come here and he
 2 wants to see Christine,
 3 IR mm,
 4 SW then he- yeah it's positive- very good=
 5 IR =mm very positive.
 6 (2.0)
 7 SW and it's really quite ↑open that he puts
 8 into words what he thinks and [feels]
 9 IR [mm]

The social worker builds a description of the outcome of the intervention as 'it's positive very good' (line 4). Like Emma, Robin is described as someone who 'can say' what he thinks and who 'wants' to participate in further counselling (lines 1–2). As with Emma, the interviewer contributes to this construction, in this case by providing an affiliating parallel assessment that recycles the social worker's words 'very positive' (line 5).

In both cases, and in every case analysed, when the social worker and interviewer construct the child as willing to participate on the terms the intervention sets up, they also

construct every aspect of the child's inner life (needs, wants, feelings, thoughts, and knowledge) as working in the same direction. Moreover, they characterize the children as able to express what they want. These characterizations correspond to the intervention model's core goal, which is helping children organize their feelings and gain hope. The social workers do not have to account further for their professional actions because the ideal of children's participation fits well with the category of the child who willingly follows the intervention model. The children's willingness is central to the success of the intervention, and the relationship between children and social workers is presented as a relationship in which social workers deliver what children request.

Developing children

Social workers described most children as at least temporarily unwilling to participate in the intervention. However, they did not necessarily describe the intervention as a failure in these cases. Instead, they used children's unwillingness to legitimize the success of the intervention. In the next excerpt, the social worker refers to 10-year-old Samuel's unwillingness to participate in a group intervention as a sign of positive development. The interviewer has already asked if the intervention was good for Samuel, and the social worker has said yes. Here, she accounts for this assessment:

- 1 SW both Anna and I were surprised at his development
 2 during the sem[ester]
 3 [mm]
 4 SW because you see at the end of the group he
 5 didn't want to come,
 6 (.)
 7 IR okay?
 8 SW so willingly no 'cause he had started to
 9 practise basketball,
 10 (.)
 11 IR mm,
 12 SW and he thought it was so much more
 13 f[un than t]o be here and you have to
 14 IR [hah hah]
 15 SW sympathize with that 'cause (.) what matters here in
 16 life?
 17 IR yes [hah hah]
 18 SW [hhh hah]
 19 IR yes when you are ten isn't he hah
 20 SW yeah hah yeah [and] we just encouraged it,
 21 IR [yeah]
 22 (.)
 23 SW in every way,
 24 IR yeah
 25 SW but we still wanted [him] to come here
 26 IR [yeah]
 27 SW the last a- 'cause he could ask like

12 IR m,
 13 SW but then things started to happen after this
 14 third time
 15 (1.0)
 16 SW it was like a big sigh [heh] as he went out
 17 IR [↑m]
 18 SW of the room then he could actually lift the corners of his
 19 mouth.
 20 IR mm mm,
 21 SW mm
 22 (.)
 23 SW so I can think definitely that it was right,
 24 (.)
 25 SW and it was perfectly enough in this case.

As in the excerpt about Samuel, the social worker's decision to continue the counselling despite Tim's unwillingness is justified by his development – from being not 'really willing' (line 8) to being able to 'lift the corners of his mouth' (lines 17–18). By focusing on development, the interviews about both Samuel and Tim mobilize a success repertoire in which the outcome concerns whether the intervention changed anything for them (see Partanen et al., 2006). This contrasts with the accounts concerning Emma and Robin, which described the interventions as successful because the children wanted to participate. Although the social workers describe all four children as having benefited from the interventions, they connect Samuel's and Tim's unwillingness to their lacking the competence required to be treated as full participants. The social workers and the interviewer may have considered the interventions to be failures if Samuel and Tim had quit when they wanted to (Samuel had to take part in the pre-set number of group sessions, and to avoid being considered a drop-out, Tim had to participate in the counselling at least three times). Thus, whereas the relationship between the social workers and Emma and Robin is displayed as a partnership, the relationship between the social workers and Samuel and Tim is marked by the difference in competence between children and adults and between professionals and service users. This construction of unwilling, developing children entails a predetermined participation in which the children are referred to as competent only insofar as they wish to participate in the activities that the intervention model suggests. The next section shows how children who persist in doing something other than what the social worker advises are described as problematic in relation to the intervention outcome.

Ruling children

Only in relation to two of the 35 children did the social workers describe the intervention as not working. In those two cases, they described the children as trying to make their own decisions about the intervention in opposition to the social workers' advice. Prior to the interaction in the excerpt below, the social worker has described the intervention as 'not very fitting' for five-year-old Maria, partly because Maria's mother did not want the social worker to bring up violence. The interviewer then asks the yes/no question 'has

she wanted to come here or' (line 3). The social worker's description involves further accounts of why the intervention did not work for Maria, despite the fact that she wanted to come:

- 1 IR how has it been with her,
 2 (.)
 3 IR has she wanted to come here or.
 4 (.)
 5 SW yes she's wanted to come here,
 6 (0.5)
 7 SW and (0.5) but she's been wanting to rule a
 8 lot.
 9 IR mm,
 10 SW she's wanted to rule that 'today we're gonna
 11 do this and now I'm gonna' she's accepted a
 12 bit that I'm trying to decide 'yes but now
 13 we'll do this first and then we can finish
 14 by doing that'.
 15 IR mm,
 16 SW then she does that a little while and then
 17 'now then?'
 18 IR ri(h)ght hah what is it that she wants to do
 19 then?
 20 SW well she wants to play games or she wants to
 21 draw this,
 22 IR right.
 23 SW so it's been a lot of painting pictures for
 24 mom.
 25 IR right.
 26 SW with big hearts.

Playing games and painting pictures of hearts (lines 20, 23, 26) are activities that fit poorly with The Stairs model, which focuses on reconstructing instances of fathers' violence against mothers. The social worker's accounts of her efforts to be the one who decides what to do in the intervention can be heard as excuses for not following the intervention model. By animating her negotiation with Maria, 'but now we'll do this first' (lines 12–14), the social worker shows, rather than reports, a situation (on active voicing, see Wooffitt, 1992: 170). This display works to counter a version in which the social worker could have been accused of not having tried hard enough. Maria is quoted as dutifully following the social worker's directions but not really wanting to cooperate (lines 16–17). The interviewer's laughter and the question 'what is it that she wants to do then' (lines 18–19) can be heard as orienting to the category-activity puzzle (see Stokoe, 2012), in which Maria is described as 'doing ruling', an activity normally associated with adults and professionals – in this institutional context the social worker (see Pinkney, 2011). Thus, the social worker and interviewer collaboratively build Maria's actions of playing games and painting pictures for her mother as unwanted and unexpected actions for a child in counselling according to The Stairs model.

In a final example, five-year-old Simon is also described as willing to participate in the intervention, but not in the right way. The social worker and the interviewer talk about Simon's counselling and how it came to focus on physical violence against him rather than the violence against his mother. The social worker has previously described Simon making decisions about the counselling sessions and her own failed attempts to take control of the topic of the sessions. Here, she further explains the situation by suggesting that Simon has been influenced by a police interview in which he was asked about the perpetrator's direct assault against himself:

- 1 SW I can have a (.) a thought in the back of my
 2 head and it's this that (.) eh this man is
 3 you know (0.5) reported to the police for
 4 assault against Simon too,
 5 IR okay,
 6 SW so I think Simon has been interviewed by the
 7 police about this.
 8 IR okay,
 9 (0.5)
 10 SW so I can believe that this is (.) he is (.)
 11 or I can't believe but I can think (.) the
 12 thought has like- (.) that that he's
 13 progr[amm]ed that that's what it's about.
 14 IR [mm]
 15 IR right.
 16 (.)
 17 IR mm,
 18 SW and that I really have heard a- this kind of
 19 police interview things,
 20 IR right m,
 21 (0.5)
 22 SW and (2.5) in a different situation and like
 23 (.) under different circumstances well maybe maybe
 24 I could have gotten behind this
 25 sto[ry] and possibly find a different-
 26 IR [m]
 27 SW Simon's own story.

The social worker's account of why Simon has talked about violence against himself instead of violence against his mother is delivered in a cautious way as an excuse for her professional actions. In lines 10–13, the description of Simon as 'programmed' involves repairs from 'I can believe' to 'I can think' and then to the even more cautious 'the thought has like' (where a likely continuation is 'crossed my mind'). This suggests that displaying Simon as 'programmed' is a delicate matter that involves risks for the social worker. However, with her receipt 'right' (line 15), the interviewer treats this account as recognizable and unproblematic. The counselling concerned something important to Simon, and the social worker and interviewer could produce the account as the social worker's choice to be flexible and sensitive to Simon's needs. However, the social worker does not describe her actions as sensitive or Simon as competent. Instead, she makes an

excuse for the outcome of the intervention by mobilizing the category of the police, which is connected to power and formal investigative techniques. In doing so, the social worker also invokes the category of the manipulated child who has been 'programmed' by the police interview (lines 12–13, 18–19).

The social worker's excuse can be understood in relation to the obligation to follow through with the intervention model. By mobilizing a repertoire of circumstances (line 23), the social worker minimizes her responsibility for not talking about violence towards the mother (see Iversen, 2008). Most importantly, by repairing what can be heard as 'a different story' to 'Simon's own story' (lines 25, 27), the social worker counteracts a version in which the police-interview story could be just as important as a different story. Accordingly, the social worker draws upon a repertoire of the child's 'pure voice' and agency outside the social realm to account for not following Simon's wishes (see James et al., 1998: 13; Komulainen, 2007; Pinkney, 2011). Indeed, the social worker accepts that Simon was physically abused, but she does not describe talking about the violence against Simon as his own story. Simon's decisions about the counselling sessions paradoxically become the social workers' failure to give him a chance to express his own story.

Whereas the social workers describe the other children in positive terms, either as competent or developing, they display Maria and Simon as making decisions about the intervention in opposition to the social workers' advice. Both Maria and Simon could have been described as competent: Maria's playing could have been treated as a way into a narration of violence (see Eskonen, 2005) and Simon could have been described as needing to deal with the violence against himself. But the social workers do not interpret the children's actions this way. Instead, they describe the intervention as restricted or influenced by other actors: Maria's mother decided that the social worker could not mention violence, and the police encouraged Simon to talk about violence against himself. The categorization of Maria and Simon as influenced by other (adult) actors may be related to their young ages: While 10-year-old Samuel, in the previous section, was categorized as actively voicing his wishes but not knowing his own good, five-year-old Tim was, similarly to Maria and Simon, referred to in passive terms ('wasn't willing', 'things started to happen'). Regardless of the reasons why, it is clear that the accounts of responses to ruling children lack justifications for following these children's wishes. The social workers describe themselves as going along with in this sense, as respecting the ideal of participation. However, in their accounts in the evaluation interviews, they interpret this participation as a failed intervention and provide excuses attributing that failure to themselves and the child rather than to the intervention model. The interview interaction thus downplays the ideal of participation when it conflicts with the intervention model.

Discussion and conclusion

Social workers today face the responsibility of bringing together quite different demands: They need to encourage service users' participation as well as stay true to well-defined intervention models (e.g. Van Nijnatten and Jongen, 2011; Zvoch, 2009). The current study has examined interactional details of how social workers negotiate

these demands in evaluation interviews. The findings contribute to previous work on restrictions and enablement of children's agency and participation in institutional settings (e.g. Hutchby, 2005a; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; James et al., 1998) by demonstrating how the evaluation interviews reproduce an order of *predetermined participation*.

In the excerpts about Samuel and Tim, the social workers account for not responding to the children's wishes. Predicates tied to subjectivity and lack of competence, such as whining and wishing to do what is 'more fun', justify breaking the norm of doing what children want. The social workers have the opposite task in the excerpts about Maria and Simon: to account for not following the intervention model. But their accounts are designed as excuses rather than justifications: External circumstances and the powerful category of the police are, for example, held responsible for the social worker's actions. Thus, the accounts invoke a predetermined participation that treats children's willingness as important only if they are first established as competent by wanting to do what the social worker advises. This supports recent work (Antaki, 2013) on how knowledge is treated in interaction. Some categories of people – including children – have low epistemic status in society, and these people's primary access to knowledge, even concerning their own wishes, may be disregarded by those who claim to know more.

A practice that adheres strictly to intervention models may work well for some children but is problematic when children are dissatisfied with professionals' responses to them (see Eriksson, 2012). In the context of social work, where children's unwillingness is often understood as a call for external motivation (see Hendersen and Thompson, 2011), the focus on model consistency risks enforcing the difference in rights between adult social workers and child service users. Therefore, children's participation, especially in institutional settings, needs to be undergirded by recognition of them as competent enough to challenge restrictions. Actual participation can never be predetermined (see Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010; McDonald, 2009; Pinkney, 2011).

These findings may be linked to their Swedish context. More likely, they are linked to the evaluation context: A high-stakes setting in which the social workers must account for their actions in relation to norms concerning model consistency may promote categorical descriptions. Further studies are needed to explore the validity of a moral order of predetermined participation in other institutional and national contexts. The connection between professionalism and competence in interviews in social work does not come as a surprise and does not mean that research on intervention effectiveness should be abandoned. Evaluation studies may be the most fruitful way to study conditions within social work settings on a large-scale basis. What this study suggests instead is the importance of continuing to explore in detail the social aspects of interviewing in social work as the field increasingly relies on research for its improvement.

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Notes

1. The Regional Ethics Committee in Gothenburg has approved the evaluation and the use of the interviews for qualitative analysis (Nr 292-05).
2. I translated the excerpts from Swedish to English with the aim of preserving the qualities I discuss in the analysis.

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Appendix: Extract from Gail Jefferson's (2004: 24–31) transcription symbols

[Onset of overlap
]	The point at which two overlapping utterances end
=	Latching, no break or gap
(0.0)	Elapsed time by tenth of seconds
(.)	Micro pause
<u>word</u>	Stress via pitch and/or amplitude
:	Prolongation of the immediate prior sound
↑↓	Shifts into especially high or low pitch
,?.	Punctuation marks are used to indicate the usual intonation
WORD	Louder sounds
°word°	Softer sound
wo-	Cut off
>word<	The bracketed sounds are sped up
<word>	The bracketed material is slowed down
.hhh	Inbreath
hhh.	Outbreath
wo(hh)rd	Laughter particles in word
((word))	The transcriber's comments