

SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

Kitti Kutrovátz

Intensive Parenting

Perspectives on Parental Time and Mediation of Technology Use

PhD Thesis

Supervisors:

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Gábor Király, PhD habil.**

Department of Sociology and Social Policy

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1. Earlier research results and the research rationale

1.1. Research problem

While there has been an upward trend in the time parents and children spend together (Bianchi 2011), there is also intensifying parental anxiety about whether the former are spending enough time with children (Milkie et al. 2004; Nomaguchi et al. 2005; Roxburgh 2006). Moreover, a growing number of studies are investigating parental stress and relations between parenthood and mental health (e.g. Ruppener et al. 2019; Rizzo et al. 2013; Nomaguchi – Milkie 2020). The ‘parenthood paradox’ is the term used to describe the discrepancy between the expectations of being a parent and the empirical evidence that parenthood is linked to poor mental health (Rizzo et al. 2013; Nomaguchi – Milkie 2020). Moreover, studies from the last decade show that parents of infants and toddlers report better mental health than parents of older children, especially parents of teenagers (Luthar – Ciciolla 2016; Meier et al. 2018).

In connection to that, the cultural expectations about and experiences with parenting have changed enormously over the last couple of decades in Western societies, resulting in the development of contemporary parenting culture (Hays 1996; Nelson 2010; Furedi 2001). This ideal was introduced and described by Sharon Hays’ concept of intensive mothering (1996), which argued that mothering has become resource-intensive: mothers are required devote large amounts of time and energy to their children to ensure their proper development (Hays 1996). Furthermore, increasing risk awareness has also contributed to the changes in parenting (Furedi 2001). Therefore, parental monitoring and supervision have also become important elements of the new style of parenting. Consequently, these changes primarily concern the intensification of parenting – namely, the extension and social inflation of the parental role (Furedi 2001). While the rise of this parenting cultural script emerged first in the US and the UK, in recent years it has also spread beyond these countries (Dermott – Pomati 2016; Gauthier et al. 2021).

The concept of quality time – as one of the parental resources – has become an important aspect of the new parenting ideal (Snyder 2007; StGeorge – Fletcher 2012). In connection with this, there is a growing debate that what matters for children’s outcomes is not the total amount of shared time but rather how parents spend time with their children (Hsin – Felfe 2014). However, there is a relative lack of empirical evidence about this (Craig et al. 2014). Moreover, a squeezed feeling of time might influence the quality of parental time and the level of parental engagement (Kutrovátz 2017).

In addition, it might be a crucial dilemma for parents how to navigate adolescents' technology use. Technical devices might lead to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge and increase the cognitive outcomes of children (Camerini et al. 2018). On the other hand, based on the time-displacement approach, screen time used for entertainment or social media might compete with that available for other enrichment activities such as school-related assignments or extracurricular activities (Camerini et al. 2018). Consequently, there is growing interest in parental mediation strategies related to children's technology use in the public and academic discourse that refers to the communication and behavioural strategies applied in parent-child relations regarding children's technology and internet use (Clark 2011; Livingstone et al. 2011). Therefore, mediation of adolescents' technology use might be a particularly relevant topic within the framework of intensive parenting.

Most of the studies on parenting focus on young children, thus their results emphasize the significance of early years (Waldfogel 2016; Milkie et al. 2015; Bianchi – Robinson 1997; Fomby – Musick 2018; Gracia – García-Román 2018). However, recent findings from the US show that spending time together with parents might be as beneficial for older children as for younger ones (Milkie et al. 2015: 358). In addition, the increase in time spent parenting primarily involves children until they reach school age; there has been even a sustained decrease in time spent on shared activities with children older than seven years old (Harcza 2014).

Additionally, there is growing evidence that entertainment technologies – such as videogames and content consumption on various screens – play a pervasive role in the lives of teenagers (Gardner – Davis 2013; Pew Research Centre 2018). Consequently, this dissertation focuses on young adolescents aged between 12 and 16 years old and their parents.

1.2. Earlier empirical findings and research questions

The aim of this research is to explore *how ideals about contemporary parenting shape parental time perceptions and the parental mediation of technology use*. This thesis seeks to increase understanding of what role these practices play in parenting today.

The dissertation focuses on different aspects – quantitative and qualitative – of parental time, and especially on the subjective perceptions of family members. On the one hand, growing time pressure might influence parental time perceptions negatively (Bianchi et al. 2006; Roxburgh 2006; Ruppanner et al. 2019), thus the research investigates the experience of

hurriedness and focus in parental time. On the other hand, based on ideas about parental determinism – namely the claim that parents’ practices are aimed at cultivating children’s skills and abilities for the sake of the latter’s developmental and educational outcomes (Faircloth 2014; Lareau 2003; Nomaguchi – Milkie 2020) – cognitive enhancement is considered of crucial significance during the period of adolescence, thus the study investigates those events and activities that are seen to be important in this respect. Accordingly, this study measures two elements of quality time; namely, enrichment activities, and focused time.

In terms of parental mediation of technology usage, Steinfeld (2021) argues that a combination of a restrictive strategy and active mediation contributes to fostering teenagers’ future self-regulation. The restrictive strategy involves limiting access, content, and social media use, and involves rules related to how and when to use the related gadgets, while active mediation together with the co-use of technology is aimed at educating children to behave properly on social media, and negotiating, interpreting, and discussing access to content (Kutrovátz et al. 2018). In connection with the intensive parenting ideal, restrictive mediation might be especially effective in reducing screen time or risk (Naab 2018). In contrast, active mediation might enhance the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge that enable appropriate online behaviour and improve digital literacy.

Consequently, this study investigates how the former diverse forms of parental time and parental mediation influence the subjective quality of parenting. Additionally, it explores how parents consider parental time; how consciously they mediate teenagers’ technology use; and what their intentions are with these practices. Understanding these factors might highlight some features and differences in contemporary parenting in Hungary.

RQ1: What defines the subjective quality of parenting? How do parents perceive the intensive practices of parental time and the parental mediation of technology?

Although expectations about intensive parenting seem to concern mothers and fathers similarly, responsibilities have remained unequal, thus parenting practices are highly gendered and might lead to more stress and frustration for women than for men (Ishizuka 2019, Faircloth 2014). Moreover, there is empirical evidence that parental time pressure does not decrease as children grow (Ruppner et al. 2019). However, while expectations related to parenting are deeply influenced by the norms of the middle-class (Dermott – Pomati 2016), there is increasing empirical evidence that the ideal of intensive parenting has expanded across social classes, but parenting practices take different forms (Nomaguchi – Milkie 2020).

Concerning parental mediation, similar patterns have been identified in previous research. Accordingly, mothers apply mediation strategies more frequently than fathers (Symons et al. 2017), and those with a higher level of education apply parental mediation strategies more often (Garmendia et al. 2012). Also, the digital skills of parents are determinant, and this factor is also dependent on the status of parents (de Almeida et al. 2012; Barbovschi et al. 2015).

Researching parental behaviour might contribute to a deeper understanding of social expectations related to parenting that may differ according to social stratification and parental gender. Therefore, investigating dimensions of parenting might be crucial for understanding the maintenance of inequalities or their increase. Consequently, the second research question address the associations of the socioeconomic status and gender of parents with these parenting practices, thereby focusing on the inequality of parenting:

RQ2: How do the gender and socioeconomic status (SES) of parent affect the subjective quality of parenting? What are the differences in gender and SES in terms of parental time perceptions and in patterns of parental mediation?

Investigations concerning family dynamics typically focus on parents and ignore the perspective of children (Milkie et al. 2010; Kremer-Sadlik – Paugh 2007; Christensen 2002). However, there are some examples of investigations of parental time from the children’s point of view that have generated paradoxical results, underlining the importance of what are considered the quality dimensions of parental time by the actors themselves (Galinsky 1999, StGeorge – Fletcher 2012). Accordingly, several scholars have argued that routine activities, like watching television together or having meals together, are considered important for children (McKee et al. 2003; Näsmen 2003). Galinsky (1999) also reported a discrepancy in thinking about time between parents and children based on an examination of both perspectives.

Therefore, the research investigates and compares both parents’ and children’s subjective perceptions, satisfaction, and opinions about parental time. The last question focuses on teenagers’ perceptions about parental time by comparing its effect on parents’ and adolescents’ accounts of the quality of parenting:

RQ3: What are the differences between parents’ and adolescents’ parental time perceptions in defining the subjective quality of parenting? What kind of parental time is important for adolescents?

2. Research data and methods

2.1. Research design & data

This study is part of a broader research project¹ that focuses primarily on parents' and their teenage children's (12-16 years old) perceptions of time and on parental mediation strategies in Hungary.

The project employs a mixed-methods research design: a national representative survey using parent-child dyads is complemented by semi-structured interviews. Mixed-methods design integrates data that are collected from quantitative and qualitative parts of a study and merges the multiple perspectives and positions in one theoretical framework (Creswell – Plano Clark 2007). This research approach enables the merging of the generalisability and explanatory nature of quantitative methodologies with the explorative aims of qualitative methodologies (Hesse-Biber 2010). This research employs a sequential explanatory sequential design with the dominance of the quantitative part.

The survey data are from a F2F CAPI piece of research carried out with 1000 Hungarian families in November 2017. The purpose of the study was to obtain knowledge about teenagers' and their parents' perceptions of the time they spend together, as well as adolescents' technology use and screen time, parenting, their wellbeing, and parents' work-life balance. Families with adolescents aged 12-16 years old were randomly selected; the sample is representative at the household level by the main regions of Hungary and by the type of settlement (Budapest, county centres, towns, villages). On the individual level, the sample represents families with children in the target group by age and gender of the child. There was a minimum 40% quota for men to ensure that fathers were represented too.

The preliminary findings of the survey data provided inputs to designing the qualitative phase. The data showed that the patterns of parental time and also parental mediation vary greatly according to the socioeconomic status of parents, and parent's gender. Therefore, these two characteristics were the most influential factors when forming our target group – besides the age of children – in the qualitative section, for exploring the differences more comprehensively. From the status variables we chose the educational level of parents since this is an easily accessible piece of data about interviewees. Accordingly, we aimed to create two groups of parents according to their educational level and intended to involve fathers as respondents. Similar to the quantitative data collection process, the sample was built on parent-child dyads, and we involved those teenagers who were aged between 12 and

¹ The project has been funded through the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund project ('Race against time' NKFIH K120089; The head of the project team: Beáta Nagy, Csc.)

16 years old. First, we recruited respondents through schools because we assumed that school management and class teachers would have sufficient information about pupils' social background. During the interviewing process, we also employed snowball sampling to increase the efficiency. Ultimately, in 2019, from January until June (during school time) I conducted interviews with members of 29 families. Since this research focuses on actively employed parents and the time they spend with their children, I excluded five cases from this investigation. Therefore, the qualitative sample consists of 24 parent-child dyads. Mothers are overrepresented (17), while 14 girls and 10 boys participated in the research. The mean age of the parents was 46 years old. Most of the families (18) lived in the capital Budapest; the others were also from nearby. Most parents responded that they had good material circumstances, five families had only one parent in the household.

However, the distribution of parents by educational level was balanced; it was mainly those with a lower education that were excluded because of their inactive employment status. In addition, the educational level did not totally grasp their social position because white-collar workers and self-employed and entrepreneurs were overrepresented in the sample. Therefore, besides the educational level, we included type of occupation to distinguish two groups of parents by socioeconomic background. Consequently, we considered as higher status parents those individuals who had white-collar positions, or were managers, or self-employed professionals with higher education (n=17). All blue-collar workers and one self-employed with a secondary education were defined as lower status parents (n=7).

2.2. Analytical strategies

In the quantitative part bivariate analyses were implemented using mean comparisons with one-way ANOVA and chi-squared independence testing in simple two-dimensional contingency tables in order to describe the investigated sample and explore the socio-demographic correlations. Then, multivariate analyses were conducted using binary logistic regression models to analyse how diverse aspects of quality time and parental mediation affect the subjective quality of parenting, to explore gender and socioeconomic status (SES) differences, and to investigate the discrepancies in parents' and adolescents' perceptions in this regard. In terms of SES differences, I compared two groups based on their type of occupation: white-collar workers and entrepreneurs were considered higher status parents with blue-collar workers as lower status parents. I relied on the estimation of average marginal effects to compare the diverse effects and to provide a more accurate interpretation. Marginal effect relies not only on the parameter estimate of the variable, but considers the

values and parameter estimates of other variables, therefore with average marginal effects the directions and powers of causal relations can be measured and compared, in contrast to applying estimates of odds ratio (Bartus 2005).

The qualitative part of this study draws on thematic analysis following the definition of Braun and Clark (2006). The scholars propose that thematic analysis is a method that enables the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns – as themes – within data (Braun – Clarke, 2006:79).

Since the current study employs an explanatory sequential research design, where quantitative data dominate the analysis and the qualitative part provides richer and more nuanced explanations of these results, I employed theory-driven analysis. The themes relate to the specific research questions based on the theoretical approach, such as the diverse types of parental quality time or parental mediation strategies, and the evaluation of shared time and teenagers' screen time. However, I intended to be reflexive and open-minded enough to identify important themes apart from those implied by the research questions that were embedded in the theoretical framework. Therefore, a typical semantic approach was applied: themes were identified at the semantic level that were associated with the explicit meanings of the data.

3. Results

3.1. Intensive parenting

- First, I found evidence that focused time is the most important aspect of parental time, that affects the subjective quality of parenting positively. In other words, when parents perceive time as calm and can pay attention to their children when they spend time together they have a higher level of parenting quality. Similarly, the qualitative results show that paying attention to children, having spontaneous moments or sharing family habits that enable a feeling of togetherness and create deep connections were crucial for parents. Based on parents' accounts, I termed this type of quality time the *everyday rituals* and *quality moments*. These times are mainly associated with everyday practices on weekdays and enable parents and children to focus on each other and to experience intimate moments and connections. Spontaneous moments are most appreciated since these enable intensive connections with each other.
- The other aspect of quality time – enrichment time – can negatively affect the subjective quality of parenting, in contrast to our hypothesis of its positive effect. The survey data demonstrate that when parents spend time playing, attending sports or cultural events too frequently they evaluate themselves as worse in terms of their parenting. In the qualitative part enrichment activity typically refers to organized time on weekends. The qualitative data demonstrate that the primary goal of these activities is similar to focused time – such as creating a feeling of togetherness and connection –; however, these activities are also aimed at compensating for the time deficit on weekdays and enriching children's outcomes.
- In terms of parental mediation, I found that parents who actively mediate their teenager's technology use have a higher level of subjective quality of parenting. In contrast, the assumed positive impact of applying restrictions on the subjective quality of parenting is less strongly supported – and it involves white-collar workers and entrepreneurs. However, the qualitative results demonstrate that restriction is the most dominant strategy among parents because it is an effective means of decreasing screen time and parents' general perceptions of technology use are influenced by risk awareness. It is important to note that a restriction strategy contradicts contemporary parenting values since it does not enable self-regulation and discussions and threatens the child's agency. Although restriction is also a resource-intensive practice of

parenting, I identified patterns of active mediation that also reflected the features of intensive parenting – such as the provision of expert guidance or constant negotiations. Moreover, active mediation is considered to be an ideal strategy among the investigated parents.

Consequently, providing focused time for children and following an active mediation strategy of technology use are considered highly important and appreciated practices among parents of adolescents in Hungary. Enrichment activities might be counterproductive in terms of the subjective quality of parenting, since they might result in conflict with teenagers who are striving for autonomy. Last, restriction is widely used to control younger teenagers' media use, but contradicts with the contemporary parenting values that might explain the lack of association with the subjective quality of parenting.

3.2. Gender and SES differences

- Comparing parents' gender, we see that having focused time with children is more significant for fathers, while for mothers applying an active mediation strategy and spending more parental time on weekends are especially relevant determinants of positive parenting quality. However, among fathers focused time is the only influential factor, while mother's subjective quality of parenting is defined by all the aspects of parental time and by active mediation. Accordingly, mothers who perceive their parental time as rather calm and focused and who spend more time on weekends with their children and follow an active mediation strategy in terms of navigating their children's digital media use tend to have a better subjective quality of parenting. However, more time spent on the weekdays and participating in too many enrichment activities is associated with a lower level of parenting quality for mothers.

The qualitative data demonstrate that mothers have a greater burden due to the organisation of the everyday lives of children, they are more likely to report about time pressure, time deficit with children that might hinder them from having quality time with their children. In contrast, fathers rather consider organized programs and enrichment activities as an important time with their children.

In terms of gender, the enforcement of rules is rather a maternal responsibility, but more remarkable differences are associated with the gender of children. The children's

diverse patterns of media use influence what strategies parents follow. Since boys are more likely to play video games on computers, parents can control this form of usage more effectively. Navigating smart device use – including of their own smart phones and the girls’ social media use – is a great challenge for parents.

- The role of parental mediation and quantity time spent on weekends differ remarkably between higher and lower status parents in terms of defining parenting quality. Higher status parents have a better subjective quality of parenting if they follow an active mediation or restriction strategy when navigating their child’s technology use, while these practices do not matter for lower status parents. It is especially applying active mediation that there is stronger evidence for. Moreover, there is a controversial impact of the amount of parental time spent on weekends: those lower status parents who spend more time with their children evaluate their parenting quality as better, while for higher status parents this is associated with lower parenting quality. However, concerning quality time both aspects – focus and enrichment – influence parents with different types of occupation in a similar way and to the same extent: focused time positively, while too much enrichment time negatively correlates with the subjective quality of parenting. There is stronger evidence for the impact of enrichment time among lower status parents.

The qualitative data strengthen these findings: lower status parents in the sample are less likely to have family traditions – such as shared family meals, or the routines of the everyday life of the family that allow an experience of togetherness. They are also more rushed and have fewer resources for organizing programs or having holidays. It is important to note that they also consider these quality times important in parenting. However, there is a difference in their attitudes towards parental time: higher status parents regard routine activities as an opportunity to create quality time with children.

With regard to parental mediation, higher status parents try to implement strategies more consciously and consistently: applying active mediation and discussing the effects of usage are also more typical among them. Yet higher status parents rather view their own strategies – especially restriction – critically since they are not compatible with their own modern perceptions about good parenting values. However, lower status parents are rather passive in terms of the parental mediation of technology use. There are also parents who do not have knowledge about how to control their children’s device use, or they do not have the time and energy to enforce rules or renegotiate

agreements, etc. This relates to the social status of parents: lower status parents are more likely to lack these resources.

- Last, the qualitative data showed that the screen-time patterns of adolescents influence how and when families can spend family time together. When severe restrictions are applied, parents consistently respect the time allowed for screen usage or intend to foster a balance between letting children use their smart device and involving them in family activities. Additionally, higher status parents also consider and use family leisure activities purposely to provide alternatives to screen time as a strategy for decreasing teenager's device use.

Consequently, mothers are more concerned with the responsibility of parenting –for instance, with spending enough and sufficient (focused) time with their children and mediating their media use. In addition, parents' educational and income level and (typically in connection with these) their digital literacy and beliefs about technology significantly determine how they navigate their children's technology use and the amount and quality of time they spend together. Moreover, this study highlights the relevance of intensive parenting ideals among more educated and wealthier parents. The diverse attitudes towards spending parental time on weekend time according to social status point to the greater time deficit of lower status parents and to the high expectations of parenting among higher status parents.

3.3. Comparison of parents' and adolescents' perspectives

- With regard to the differences in perceptions of parents and children, we conclude that the descriptive results show very similar patterns. Small but significant deviations are observable in terms of parental attention and the frequency of playing together: children evaluate their parents better regarding their attention and perceive less frequent playing with their parents.
- Comparing the perspectives of parents and children in the explanatory models, focused time has a stronger effect on adolescents' assessment of parenting quality; however, the evidence is rather weak. Although, the models do not show any other significant factor that is related to teenagers' assessments of parenting quality. In terms of subjective quality of parenting, however, I find weak evidence that the amount of time is also correlated with parenting: when parents can spend more time with their children, they have a better subjective quality of parenting. Therefore, the results of teenager's

perceptions reinforce the assumption that children might perceive and consider parental time differently to parents.

In summary, the intensive parenting ideal shapes parental time in the way that spontaneous, focused time is highly appreciated among Hungarian parents and teenage children as well, while cultivating children's talent does not comprise part of spending quality time with children. With regard to parental mediation and following the norms of intensive parenting, parents typically use a high level of control and a conscious mediation strategy – with active mediation the desired form –, and provide alternative programs to screen time to protect their children from harm and cultivate their development while fostering their autonomy and independence. Moreover, as higher status parents have more quality time for their children and typically employ these mediation strategies, the results of this thesis indicate that these practices are a resource-demanding fields of parenting, and competencies and resources are unequally divided according to the social status of parents. The findings show evidence that these practices are primarily maternal responsibilities – in other words, the high standard of intensive parenting involves mothers to a greater extent. Adolescents' different perception of time also underlines how much social expectations influence parenting behaviours.

This study makes contributions to the emerging international literature on contemporary parenting (Faircloth et al. 2013; Ennis 2014; Gauthier et al. 2021) in three ways.

First, the approach and the target group of the research broadens the debate about intensive parenting. On the one hand, applying mixed methods reveals the features of parenting practices in Hungary in a complex way and enhances the deeper understanding of this cultural model in an Eastern European context. On the other hand, linking two fields of parenting – parental time and the parental mediation of technology use – together in one theoretical framework widens the scope of intensive parenting practices. Our findings show that meeting the requirements of intensive parenting – e.g. the widely held beliefs about the importance of enrichment activities – might be an additional burden for parents, particularly for blue-collar workers and women. Moreover, the study reveals how parental mediation of technology usage forms a new domain of parenting practices, and it is especially active mediation and restriction that form part of this ideal in the case of teenagers.

Further, a focus on adolescents in the context of contemporary parenting models is still lacking in the empirical literature (Waldfogel 2016; Milkie et al. 2015), thus this study also

improves our knowledge about this field and contributes to comprehending the lower level of parental self-esteem and happiness when raising teenagers (Pollmann-Schult 2014; Meier et al. 2018; Nomaguchi 2012). Moreover, our findings highlight the important features of quality time with adolescents – the latter value the attention they get from parents and no rushing of parental time.

Last, this study improves the comprehension of the concept of quality time and grasps how diverse aspects of quality time might be beneficial for subjective parenting quality and the parenting evaluations of teenagers. The qualitative results concerning the parental considerations about quality time and the significant impact of focused time in the quantitative analyses show that the aspects of focus and attention and the overall perception of time might grasp the effect of quality time in a more appropriate way than concentrating on specific activities. Consequently, it is crucial to involve this element when researching quality time.

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5. The author's publication on the topic

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- Kutrovátz, K. (2022): Parental mediation of adolescents' technology use – Unequal parenting practices. *Intersections. Special Issue* [Accepted Manuscript]
- Nagy, B., Kutrovátz, K., Rakovics, M. & Király, G. (2022): Parental mediation in the age of mobile technology. *Children & Society* [Accepted Manuscript]

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- Kutrovátz, K. (2016): Book review: Barbara Hobson (ed.) (2013) Worklife balance: The agency and capabilities gap. Oxford: Oxford University Press. *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics* 2(3): 148-152.

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- Kutrovátz, K. (2019): The inequality of parental time – the role of socioeconomic status. In Örkény, A. – Csepeli, Gy. – Frank, T. Zs. (eds.): *Hyphens (kötő-jelek). Selected conference papers from the International Doctoral Student Conference on the Social Sciences*. pp. 73-84.

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- Kutrovátz Kitti (2020): Intensive Parenting – Parents' perspective on parental time and parental mediation of technology use, Kutatók Éjszakája 2020. nov. 27, Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem, 2020
- Kutrovátz Kitti (2019): A közös időtöltéssel kapcsolatos percepciók - szülők és kamaszok perspektívája, Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe, BCE 2019. november 15, 2019
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