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Parental mediation of adolescents' technology use:  
Unequal parenting practices

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### Abstract

This study explores parental mediation – its patterns, purpose and intention, the intentions behind it, and related social inequalities – from the perspective of the ideal of intensive parenting. Parental mediation in the form of restricting or monitoring teenagers' technology use might mitigate the harm of the intensive or risky online behaviour. Moreover, active mediation strategies might improve the teenagers' digital literacy by obtaining specific skills that foster appropriate online behaviour. Therefore, the paper argues that parental mediation has become a highly relevant aspect of contemporary parenting practices.

The paper is based on thematic analyses of semi-structured interviews on children's screen time and parental mediation strategies. The interviews were carried out with 29 parents of adolescents in Hungary in 2019. The findings show that restriction and active mediation primarily aimed at protecting children from risks, as a resource-intensive practice, form part of the contemporary parenting skill set. This study contributes to understanding how these skills constitute a digital cultural capital, and thereby how parenting can enhance the digital inequality.

**Keywords:** parental mediation; intensive parenting; adolescence; digital inequality

## 1 Introduction

Entertainment technologies such as videogames and content consumption on various screens as well as social media play a pervasive role in teenagers' lives (Gardner & Davis, 2013; Pew Research Centre, 2018). Adolescents' intensive technology use might be risky (Livingstone et al., 2017), such online behaviour and problems related to privacy are a well-researched area (e.g. Bányai et al., 2017; Prievara & Pikó, 2016; Király et al., 2014) – while it may have a negative impact on teens' mental health, too (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2011). However, digital devices can help with the acquisition of knowledge and improving cognitive skills of children, and the conscious use of technologies can enhance their digital literacy. Since the contemporary cultural norm of parenting emphasizes the parental omni-

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potence (Furedi, 2001), and it has become a parental responsibility to improve children's digital skill and, enhance their ability to manage technologies (Yuen et al., 2018), it might be a crucial dilemma for parents how to navigate adolescents' technology use. The concept of parental mediation describes those strategies that aim to maximize the benefits and mitigate the harm of use (Livingstone et al., 2017). Therefore, we argue that conscious parental mediation might be a specific domain of intensive parenting.

Moreover, the pandemic has alerted us about the embeddedness of technology in parenting practices and education, while pre-existing digital inequalities have grown in society. Consequently, parental mediation is considered a significant field of parenting through which digital resources may be transferred to children to ensure their competitiveness. In this study, we integrate the concept of intensive parenting (Furedi, 2012; Lareau, 2011; Nelson, 2010; Hays, 1996) with parental mediation theory (Clark, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 1999) to explore the unequal features of contemporary parenting. Therefore, we seek to explain how intensive parenting shapes the parenting practices in the area of mediation, investigating the patterns, mechanisms and intentions behind these practices.

The paper is based on the analyses of semi-structured interviews carried out with 29 parents of 12–16-year-old teenagers in Hungary in 2019. The study contributes to understanding how skills to use smart phones constitute digital cultural capital, and thereby how appropriation of these skills that differentiates families of different social status may lead to the emergence of new kinds of social inequalities.

As a point of departure, we introduce the ideal of intensive parenting and its relation to parental mediation concepts. In the next section we provide an overview of the inequalities involved in parental mediation. This is followed by the description of the sample and the methodology. Afterwards, we discuss the results. The paper ends with the main conclusions.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Inequality of contemporary parenting standards

The notion of 'parental determinism' (Furedi, 2001) indicates that parental behaviour and intervention is the main determinant of children's future. Accordingly, the related parenting approach, intensive parenting, conceives parents as being totally responsible for their children's social and emotional outcomes and educational success (Faircloth, 2014; Hays, 1996).

Connected to this, parental investment has become of great importance. Anette Lareau (2003; 2011) investigated the cultural logic of childrearing and identified 'concerted cultivation' as an intensive parenting approach of the middle class in the US. This form of parenting enables the transmitting of parents' advantages to their children. High level of parental investment is reflected in many activities which are seen as indicators of good parenting (e.g. helping with school-assignments, attending cultural programmes) (Dermott & Pomati, 2016). Additionally, there is a growing importance of expert-guidance (Gauthier et al., 2021) too: parents are increasingly expected to listen to experts' knowledge about how best to raise children.

The increasing risk awareness has also contributed to the changing of parenting (Furedi, 2001). The culture of fear resulted in parental concerns that are dominated by the

need to ensure children's safety. Therefore, parental monitoring and supervision have also become important elements of the new style of parenting. The term 'parenting out of control' describes the relevance of surveillance in modern parenting (Nelson, 2010).<sup>1</sup>

These changes are not independent of parents' social positions. In terms of parenting behaviour, there is consistent empirical evidence that social class might divide these practices (Ishizuka, 2019; Lareau, 2011; Nelson, 2010). Economic resources, human and social capital can influence how individuals meet the requirements of the ideals of intensive parenting (Dermott & Seymour, 2011).

Lareau (2003; 2011) finds that parents in the middle class are more likely to give children choices and to prepare them for success by encouraging them through the use of structured enrichment activities and verbal interaction and reasoning. In addition, they are more likely to negotiate with them about proper behaviour and offer reasoned explanations. In contrast, the 'accomplishment of natural growth' – the child-rearing style of the working class and the poor – involves providing basic care for children and allowing them to mature. Further, there is a clear distinction between adults and children: children of less privileged parents are more likely to acknowledge parental authority; these parents are more likely to use directives as the basis of parental discipline (Lareau, 2011). Similarly, Nelson (2010) also proposes that professional middle-class parents demonstrate an intensive parenting style. These parents intend to extend and defend childhood, while among lower status parents' 'parenting styles draw on concerns about concrete dangers, an awareness of youthful indiscretions' (Nelson, 2010, p. 175).

Consequently, the cultural norms of parenting and class differences in parenting behaviours might predict a range of outcomes for children and thereby contribute to comprehending the role of the family in the intergenerational reproduction of inequality (Ishizuka, 2019; Lareau, 2011).

## 2.2 Parental mediation strategies as intensive practices

In the current discourse of parenting, parental mediation of teenagers' technology usage might be an important practice to promote teenagers' expertise and also to mitigate the harm of intensive or risky use and ensure the children's mental health (Livingstone et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2010). In this section we apply the same approach as our previous quantitative analysis (Nagy et al., 2022), to discuss the types of mediation strategies.

Technical devices might provide new skills and knowledge and advance the cognitive development of children. On the other hand, the time displacement approach<sup>2</sup> suggests that screen time for social media use or entertainment might challenge other enrichment activities such as school-related or extracurricular tasks (Camerini et al., 2018). Besides, there is a current debate about the effect of screen time on children's mental health in the academic

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<sup>1</sup> The parenting practices are highly gendered and can lead to more stress and frustration for women than for men (Ishizuka, 2019; Faircloth, 2014). The detailed discussion of gender differences in parenting are outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The time displacement hypothesis (Putnam, 1995) proposes that the time that is spent on watching television relates negatively to civic engagement. In other words, screen time might erode social capital at the expense of other leisure activities.

discourse and some empirical findings prove that screen time correlate with lower level of subjective wellbeing (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2011) that might further increase the parental concerns. These concerns are also reinforced by the generational digital divide: adolescents' usage is very intensive and related patterns significantly differ from those of adults (Aarsand, 2007): they perceive themselves to be more proficient than their parents (Fletcher & Blair, 2014), thus they also value the social technology more in their life (Lee, 2013). In line with this, parents' 'lack of awareness' based on their lower level of knowledge emerges in the discussions about the threats of technology usage. Connected to this, parents are construed to be 'out of touch', which strengthens the idea of the intensification of parenting expectations (Lee et al., 2010).

The concept of digital cultural capital grasps the phenomenon of the reproduction of the competence of managing technology and points out the relation between parental digital literacy, patterns of digital media use, and children's digital skills (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Yuen et al., 2018). Related to this, parental attitudes towards technologies are defined by their social relations: parents that possess digital skills – because of their jobs – can more easily improve their children's digital literacy (Hollingsworth et al., 2011).

The notion of parental mediation refers to the communication and behavioural strategies applied in parent-child relations regarding children's technology and internet use. Moreover, it involves parents using interpersonal communication and setting rules to mitigate the harmful effects and maximise the benefits of media use (Fletcher & Blair, 2014; Clark, 2011). Based on the classical approach to control over watching television (Valkenburg et al. 1999), three main forms of parental mediation can be differentiated: active mediation, restriction, and co-using strategies. Nevertheless, recent investigations focus on the mediation of internet and mobile device usage.

Active mediation, often accompanied by the co-use of technology, is aimed at educating to promote proper behaviour on social media and negotiating, as well as interpreting and discussing about buying and accessing content. The restrictive strategy refers to limiting access, content, social media use, or buying affordances and applying rules related to the use of technical devices (Kutrovátz et al., 2018; Zaman et al, 2016).

Beside these strategies, a recent systematic literature review (Kutrovátz et al., 2018) identified two further parental mediation strategies: monitoring and deference. The strategy of monitoring involves controlling-type activity connected with social media platforms and checking content consumed or shared thereon. Moreover, monitoring might include checking children's electronic devices, browsing histories, interactions etc. With the strategy of deference, children are educated to engage in independent and responsible online behaviour without direct parental intervention concerning technology usage (Kutrovátz et al., 2018; Zaman et al., 2016; Sasson & Mesch, 2014; Padilla, Walker et al., 2012).

We can witness further changes in the theoretical landscape in relation to the concepts above. Livingstone and her colleagues (2017) identified a new strategy called enabling mediation. This form of parental practice allows children to take an active part in setting up rules through parent-child interaction. Therefore, this more complex category not only includes the attributes of the active mediation strategy, but also utilizes technical control and monitoring.

In terms of intensive parenting, active and enabling mediation allow negotiations and encourage reasoned explanations in parent-child interactions; thus, these strategies support the child's agency. Therefore, these are ideal approaches to improve digital literacy by

enhancing the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge (Nagy et al., 2022). Moreover, enabling mediation empowers children, supports their active engagement and strengthens the positive uses of the internet (Livingstone et al., 2017). Besides, the aims of the strategy of deference – autonomous and responsible online behaviour – are also consistent with those of intensive parenting; however, this form rather highlights the relevance of the parents' media usage patterns, and it is not an active one in terms of practices. Therefore, this strategy is very relevant in the period of adolescence (Nagy et al., 2022).

In contrast, restrictive practices hinder the opportunities to promote digital skills and threaten the child's agency in their relationship with their parents (Mascheroni et al., 2018). Concerning reducing screen time or online risks, restrictive mediation might be incredibly effective, however, the authority of parents might greatly influence its effectiveness (Naab, 2018), which might conflict with contemporary parenting standards.

Lastly, we argue that monitoring children's online activities might be a relevant practice of intensive parenting since surveillance is a crucial norm of contemporary parenting (Nagy et al. 2022).

It is important to note that adolescence is a challenging period concerning communication and interaction because of the latter's expansion (Fletcher & Blair, 2014; Lee, 2013). The teenagers strive for autonomy and the difficulties of this period (Nomaguchi, 2012) might hinder parents in their intention to mediate the children's digital media use. Therefore, Steinfeld (2021) argues that the combination of restrictive strategy and active mediation contributes to establish teenagers' future self-regulation.

### 2.3 Empirical findings

Literature on parental mediation is very diversified and inconclusive. It is mostly psychological and communication research that has examined this topic, thus a sociological perspective is still lacking (Kutrovátz et al., 2018). Therefore, the topics of risk, problematic online behaviour, and mental health dominate this research area (e.g. Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Bányai et al., 2017; Prievara & Pikó, 2016; Király et al., 2014; Cao et al., 2011). Additionally, most qualitative studies remain at the general, explorative level: studies focus mostly on exploring strategies and the related individual-level factors and the effectiveness of the strategies (Kutrovátz et al., 2018). How the skills of technology management and thereby the mechanisms of parental mediation are highly dependent on social position is still an under-researched question (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Yuen et al., 2018).

In connection to this, the digital literacy of parents appears to be an important individual factor that defines parental attitudes towards technologies and their choice of strategies. Daneels and Vanwynsberghe (2017) investigated this question in Belgium from the perspective of parents and adolescents. They report that while parents had a low level of technical competency, those with a critical attitude primarily used active or enabling mediation, with a focus on risks and safety associated with social media, but allowed adolescents some autonomy. They also found a new manifestation of monitoring: parents use mobile applications and social media accounts only for monitoring purposes.

Bartau-Rojas and her colleagues (2018) suggest that parental mediation is rather reactive, and that parents do not consciously plan their strategies in advance because of their lower level of digital knowledge. Therefore, parents are more likely to prohibit and restrict

their children's use due to concerns about their inappropriate online behaviour. Similarly, Fletcher and Blair (2014) also argue that parents' lack of digital skills might be related to general parental attitudes towards mediation: parents focus on what children should not do when they use screens, rather than on how they can effectively moderate their use.

Similarly, Shin (2015) found that parents in their sample in Singapore preferred using restrictive strategies – especially time restriction. The author argues that parents' feel high confidence managing and regulating their children's digital media use and this fact resulted in less engagement in active mediation.

Despite the empirical results concerning the relations between parental digital literacy and parental mediation, there is little empirical knowledge about what role parental resources play in reproducing digital inequity. Yuen and his colleagues (2018) investigated students in Hong Kong, revealing the relevance of parental mediation in creating cultural capital. The authors argue that parents with a higher level of ICT skills effectively support and guide children's media use in a way that helps them build their own competences.

In connection to digital literacy, mostly quantitative studies point out the inequalities in parental mediation based on parents' educational level and socio-economic status: the range and forms of parental mediation also differ according to diverse social groups (Nagy et al., 2021; Livingstone et al., 2017; Mascheroni et al., 2016). Accordingly, parents of higher social status navigate children's media use more frequently (Cingel & Hargittai, 2018; Mascheroni et al., 2016). Generally, higher status parents – in terms of education and income – are more likely to choose active or enabling mediation strategy (Livingstone et al., 2015; Gee, 2014). Hungarian data also support this differentiation in relation to parents: parents with lower education have been found to be rather permissive about children's media use, while higher-level education correlates with active mediation. Moreover, lower educated parents are more likely to apply strategies inconsistently (Nagy et al., 2021).

In terms of restriction, however, there are rather paradoxical results. De Haan and his colleagues (2018) suggested that technical restriction are more common among less well educated than among higher educated parents in the Netherlands. Similarly, Nelson (2010) showed that upper- and middle-class parents disapprove of the use of parental controls and filters. In contrast, other empirical findings show that restrictive mediation is applied regardless of the socio-economic status of parents: higher status parents also apply restrictions frequently (Nagy et al., 2021; Mascheroni et al., 2016).

The role of other factors linked to parental mediation is also not unequivocal in the literature. One exception to this 'rule' is the variable of the age of children: it is a general pattern that parents mediate older children less frequently. However, parental mediation of teenagers' technology use is crucial since teenagers cannot still think critically about their privacy, but their risky online behaviour increases (e.g., providing data when downloading/using applications) (Vanweesenbeck et al., 2016).

Drawing on prior theoretical concepts and empirical research, the paper seeks to answer the question how intensive parenting shapes the parental mediation strategies that parents apply to navigate their teenage children's technology usage in Hungary based on qualitative data. More precisely, we will look at: (1) how parents purposely mediate teenagers' digital media use, what kind of strategies they use, what are their intentions behind these strategies; and (2) how parental mediation differs according to the socioeconomic status of the family and what are the socioeconomic differences of these strategies and mechanisms.

The relevance of this research is twofold. Investigation of parental mediation from the perspective of intensive parenting enables a sociological perspective to be applied to the research that might reveal the unequal mechanisms of parental mediation and highlight the difficulties and contradictions associated with these practices. Moreover, most of the research projects that have explored social differences apply a quantitative approach and empirical results are quite ambiguous and inconclusive. In addition, the inconsistent use of terms makes comparison of the data difficult. The main contribution of this study is its qualitative exploration of the features of parenting practices in Hungary in a complex way that enhances the understanding of the relationship between parental mediation and intensive parenting.

### 3 Methods: Research framework, sample and data collection

This qualitative study is part of a broader mixed methods research project<sup>3</sup> that investigates parental time and parental mediation from the perspective of parents and their children. The target group of the research was working-age parents and their teenage children aged between 12 and 16 years. This study is based on parental interviews.

The study aimed to reveal socio-economic differences more comprehensively, thus respondents first were recruited through schools because we assumed that school management and class teachers would have sufficient information of the pupils' social background. In addition, we offered shopping vouchers in exchange for participation to increase willingness to respond. Despite this, recruitment was rather slow. For this reason, during the interviewing process we also employed snowball sampling to increase efficiency. Ultimately, we conducted interviews with 29 families during school time in 2019, from January until June.

Table 1 shows the distribution of parents in the sample. Mothers are overrepresented, and the mean age of the parents was 46 years. Most of the families (20) were living in Budapest; the others were also from nearby. Five were single-parent households. While the distribution of parents by educational level was balanced, this factor did not totally grasp their social position because white-collar workers were overrepresented in the sample. Therefore, besides the educational level, we included employment status and type of occupation to distinguish two groups of parents by socioeconomic background. Consequently, we considered those individuals as higher status parents who had white-collar positions, or were managers, or self-employed. All blue-collar workers and unemployed or retired parents – in early retirement due to illness – were defined as lower status parents. In the analyses, we refer to the social status of parents based on these categorisations that include the aspects of education and occupation too.

We implemented semi-structured interviews with parents and their children, each between 40–80 minutes long. Parental consent for their child's participation and informed consent for both parties concerning their voluntary participation, anonymity, and data management were obtained. The interview guide was structured according to two thematic blocks: parental time, and technology usage. Interviews begun with the discussion of the perception

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<sup>3</sup> The project has been funded through the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund project ('Race against time' NKFIH K120086; head of the project team: Beáta Nagy, CSc.)

of parental time, then interviewees described the household's infrastructure with regard to info-communication and entertainment technological devices, the patterns of their teenager's usage of the latter, and the diverse strategies employed to control or influence their screen time.

Table 1 Sample characteristics

	<i>N/Mean</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
<b>Adolescent</b>			
Boy	12	–	–
Girl	17	–	–
Age	14	12	16
<b>Parent</b>			
Father	7	–	–
Mother	22	–	–
Age	46	41	55
Number of children	2	1	5
<i>Type of settlement</i>			
Budapest	20	–	–
Town	1	–	–
Village	8	–	–
<i>Highest educational attainment</i>			
Secondary	14	–	–
Higher	15	–	–
<i>Subjective economic welfare</i>			
1 Poor	–	–	–
2	4	–	–
3	17	–	–
4 Well-off	8	–	–
<i>Type of family</i>			
Two-parent families	24	–	–
One-parent families	5	–	–
<i>Employment status</i>			
Active	24	–	–
Inactive	5	–	–

Table 1 (Continued)

<i>Type of occupation</i>			
Blue-collar	6	–	–
White-collar	9	–	–
Self-employed or manage	9	–	–
<i>Socioeconomic status</i>			
Higher status	19		
Lower status	10		

The qualitative part of this study draws on thematic analysis following the definition of Braun and Clark (2006), which enables the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns – ‘themes’ – within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The current study follows a theory-driven analysis. The themes are related to the specific research questions that are based on the theoretical approach, such as the diverse forms of parental mediation or parental attitudes and intentions. However, we took all data into consideration and strove to be reflexive and open-minded in order to be able to identify important themes (i.e. themes other than those implied by the research questions, but which were embedded in the theoretical framework). The interviews were analysed using NVivo software.

## 4 Results

In this section, we describe how purposely parents mediate teenagers' technology use, pointing to socio-economic differences amongst our informants. First, we describe parental intentions in relation to their overall perceptions of children's technology use. Then we demonstrate the main forms of parental mediation. We identify four main features: the dominance of restrictive strategies (1) (we discuss threats and punishments as a sub-theme), a diverse mix of forms of parental mediation (2), permissive mediation (3), and family time as an alternative (4).

### 4.1 Risks or benefits: Parental intentions

In general, parents perceive the intensive technology use of children as a risk: it is mainly the negative effects of such usage on physical and mental health and on social skills of children that are highlighted in the interviews.

The pessimistic overall view of teenagers' technology use is illustrated in the following quote:

I consider every single minute using the phone to be too much, so if I could, I would destroy it, and mine too.... It is [phones are] necessary but bad in today's world. (Lower status father, 44; daughter 13)

Lower status parents were more likely to be pessimistic about the new technologies; they typically compared their children's life with their own tech-free childhood in a nostalgic way. However, higher status parents were more aware of the diverse and concrete risks of online activities.

In the case of girls, fears were remarkably different according to the social status of parents. The subjects of fear were the intensive use of social media and the passive activity of watching videos among higher status parents – the following quote by a father is a good example of this. The latter considered such activities uncreative and a waste of time.

...so, I don't really like this introverted, passive, very passive activity. Because we also talked about it – that if she used [her phone] actively, so for educational programs, or she also made videos on TikTok, we could talk about it – it wouldn't count towards her time limit.... (Higher status father, 51; daughter 13)

Lower status parents tended to refer only to the safety of private accounts on social media sites, or to importance of not contacting any strangers, or the fear of addiction.

I think they still can't judge what they share, what they ask [other people about] and unfortunately that is a problem... and very often they recklessly ask things and share things with the world that they should not. (Lower status mother, 41; daughter 14)

In the case of boys – especially in relation to video gaming – the issue concerning children's mental health was thematized in both groups.

Consequently, the potential benefits – such as obtaining information, creating content, or improving English skills – were also mentioned more often by higher status parents. Moreover, in some cases these parents also showed open-mindedness and curiosity about the related changes or of the new social habits of teenagers.

However, the benefits of digital media use were mostly associated with the importance of school assignments. Digital media use appeared as an enrichment activity, in the form of co-use. The goal of the shared interpretation of content (mostly videos or films) or a common experience of co-playing was important among higher status respondents.

There is a further difference in parents' digital media use: higher status parents were more likely to be using digital devices for work, and they expressed their difficulty with managing media in their lives in terms of their own health or limiting their own screen time. Therefore, their own experiences motivated them to control their children's use.

It was also an interesting experience that, when searching for interviewees, higher status parents were recurrently motivated to participate in the research in the hope it would justify the relevance of this topic to their children. This also shows how much parents struggle with the issue of parental mediation in everyday life.

## 4.2 Forms of mediation

### 4.2.1 The dominance of restriction

Restriction is the most dominant parental strategy aimed at controlling adolescents' use of technology in our sample. This restriction-based approach also involves the constant disapproval of online activity. However, parents' restrictions showed a great variability: their

range, consistent application and effectiveness were very diverse. The mildest forms of restriction involved limiting the child's use of devices in the evening – for instance, ensuring that they leave their gadgets in the living room, or banning the use of smartphones during mealtimes. These restrictions are very typical among the families we investigated.

In some cases, restrictions are only associated with playing video games, and parents do not tend to control smart devices. Playing video games is rather typical of boys, and defining gaming time is very common among parents who have sons. However, it is important to note that parents tend to restrict younger children's access to media devices. The most refined and rigorous case involved parents specifying times at which internet access is available at home.

He can play for two hours, then stop for an hour, there is Internet from 8 to 10, from noon to two, and from 3 to 5, but within this period he has training too, so, there are some limitations of ours, but also there is training when there is no access... (Higher status mother, 49; son 15)

However, when children's media use is more diverse, or their smart phone use is most dominant, imposing restrictions might be rather challenging for parents. It is typical of girls, because media use is highly gendered among teenagers: girls are more likely to spend time on social media, while computer gaming is more typical among boys (e.g. Kutrovátz, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2018). Restricting smart phone use requires a higher level of digital skill, involving the employment of technical controls. Also, some parents mentioned that they considered smart phone use to be a private matter.

...well, a phone is very difficult to take away... because she thinks it's hers, so, I can't take it away what belongs to her, I have heard this several times [...] but I can limit the smart TV more easily, because she doesn't say then that it belongs to her. (Higher status father, 42; daughter 14)

In connection with restrictions, we defined a further subtheme: *threats* to restrict the devices and *punishment* with restriction are also typical parental practices. However, in this case decreasing media use is only an instrument and not the goal of the parental strategy: parents rather aim to increase learning time, or to convince children to complete chore such as cleaning their rooms.

...because he just had a maths test, and he got a two [a 'D' grade], so for now we have a deal with him, that he cannot use the computer for a month... (Lower status mother, 31; son 12)

The use of restrictions, and even more frequently threats and punishment, are typical, regardless of the social status of the families. However, higher status parents are more conscious in terms of their navigation of teenagers' media use, whereas lower status parents' practices are rather inconsistent. Accordingly, they restrict technology use occasionally – for instance, as a punishment, or they reprimand their children for spending too much time with a screen (or for inappropriate use such as during mealtimes). The above-mentioned rigorous restriction systems are typical of higher status parents.

Moreover, among higher status parents restrictions can conflict with parental values. On the one hand, the latter strategy questions support for self-regulation; on the other hand, it is inconsistent with the desired parenting style. Therefore, doubt about the appropriate form of parental mediation is very typical among these parents.

...it's a fact that it's effective: we achieve a limited amount of video gaming. But whether this is the best educational strategy in the long run, I'm not sure... but I don't have a better idea, honestly. (Higher status mother, 55; son 13)

Restrictions primarily concern the amount of time, and focus on video gaming. Consistent restrictions on specific online content are not typical at all in relation to this age group. Regarding the central concern of privacy, in some cases creating a Facebook account is forbidden for younger children, although they can use any other social media platforms.

Ensuring the consistency of restrictions is also very difficult, since these rules constantly change, showing the importance of negotiations involving children's desires and parents' goals. Therefore, parents are not always aware of their own rules. Moreover, despite the time restrictions, such rules need continuous surveillance for their effective enforcement.

We set up a clock with a beeper for him.... But there was always something, five more minutes, and then the five minutes was half an hour... and there was a period when we were constantly fighting, ...so it's quite tortuous – it's damn hard, I think! (Higher status mother, 42; son 13)

#### 4.2.2 Mixed strategies

A restriction approach is very dominant, but is rarely applied alone; rather, it is combined with other forms of parental mediation. All the classical forms – co-use, active mediation, and monitoring – appear among the investigated families, but typically parents mix these forms and none of them are as significant as restriction.

As mentioned above, the co-use of digital media was applied mostly to spending some quality time together and helping a child with school assignments. However, these patterns of co-use primarily do not target the effective media use or management of technology; therefore, they cannot be considered a purposeful mediation strategy.

Some of the parents had regular discussions with their children about the appropriate and effective digital media use. Generally, these parents also referred to experts and scientific research about the effects of screen time, as the following quotes illustrate:

We also discuss it a lot, sometimes I share articles with her, we talk about the use of devices – what are the advantages and disadvantages. (Higher status father, 51; girl 13)

These forms of active mediation are typically combined with consistent restrictions of digital media use.

There are differences in the level of digital literacy: higher status parents typically know of applications and programs that can be used to control or monitor teenager's media use. They may also participate in workshops or read scientific articles about the effects of digital media use. Therefore, they combine a typical strategy of restrictions with active mediation or monitoring, while regular active mediation was not mentioned by parents in lower status families.

In some families monitoring was also adopted as a strategy, but rather occasionally. For instance, when a cyber-bullying incident occurred at school, parents checked their children's messages or browser history. Parents also typically checked their social media profiles when children register on these sites for the first time. Additionally, monitoring was common when children went alone for the first time to school or to an extra-curricular activity. For this reason, parents typically used phones and applications to ensure that children are safe, not to monitor their technology usage.

### 4.2.3 Permissive mediation

Most of the lower status parents and older children's parents in our sample appeared to be passive concerning parental mediation. These parents often explain their 'no mediation' approach by referring to the trust in the relationship they have with their child, or they argue that their child is well-raised and does not behave inappropriately at the online forums.

It is worth underlining that most parents expressed disapproval about monitoring their child's media use. This is considered an intrusion into the teenager's private sphere that endangers the trust in their relationship. In relation to this, the teenagers' better digital skills were mentioned by many parents (accordingly, children often teach parents how to use the smart phones). However, higher status parents also refer to their desire to be role models in terms of technology use, especially when their children are considered to be too old for restrictions on their technology use.

Parents' permissiveness might also be influenced by the fact that the enforcement of rules is a time-intensive activity – as discussed above – that requires the parents' continuous surveillance and availability. Both groups struggle with this, but lower status parents might lack these resources to a greater extent.

...Unfortunately, it might be, or certainly is, my weakness. I don't have the energy and patience... every time I go into her room, the phone is always there, and I always have to listen [to her telling me] that only it was required for the lesson. Well, it also created extra conflict, quarrels – she is addicted, addicted! (Lower status mother, 46; girl 13)

### 4.3 Family time as alternative

We identified a further theme concerning parental mediation: the parental strategy to decrease screen time, which focuses not on the media use directly, but is related to the effective or enriching or developmental use of children's time. Accordingly, some parents regard parental time – especially family time – as an alternative to screen use. Some parents in the sample – generally those with a high level of education – perceive such activities or household tasks as a conscious parental strategy for decreasing their teenager's screen time. Therefore, this strategy works as a form of reversed time displacement if teenagers' time is filled up with alternative programs, they cannot spend too much time with technological gadgets.

Similarly, if teenagers have a lot of extracurricular activities or their parents consider that they are spending a great amount of time on enrichment activities or performing in school exceptionally, they do not strive to control their usage significantly. The following quote, on the one hand, illustrates the mother's uncertainty about their teenager's screen time, and on the other, it is a very typical attitude when adolescents are busy on weekdays:

So I think that's too much time, but if I consider that she goes to school in the meantime, she has training for two-hour... why not let her to chat with her friends in the evening? Well, and she reads a lot of books..., so I don't think I should restrict her... But obviously, well, I don't have a problem with that, I don't think it's too much. (Higher status mother, 46; girl 14)

## 5 Discussion

Given the shifts in cultural expectations associated with parenting (Furedi, 2001; Hays, 1996) and related to this, socially unequal parenting practices (Lareau, 2011; Nelson, 2010), we explored parental mediation of technology usage – one specific domain of parenting – among Hungarian parents of adolescents. Since teenagers spend a significant amount of time with digital devices (Gardner & Davis, 2013), parents might have dilemmas concerning how to best handle their technology use.

Overall, we found that parents were more aware of risks than opportunities – as is consistent with some previous findings (Bartau-Rojas et al., 2018; Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017). In line with this, parents typically aim at decreasing screen time and minimizing the potential harm of usage, while maximizing the opportunities of technology use was not a goal. Additionally, their own difficulties with digital media use also motivated them in their choice of strategies. Some of the benefits of digital media use were mentioned, but rather to justify parents' lack of no mediations, and not to encourage the effective use of digital media. However, the importance of school performance and enrichment activities in relation to screen time was remarkable. This supports the time-displacement hypothesis (Putnam, 1995) that screen time is considered risk eroding social capital. We found that higher status parents more likely provide alternative programs for the teenagers and to increase enrichment activity or motivate creative offline activities instead. They use this approach as a proactive strategy for decreasing adolescents' screen time. These activities are considered quality time among them, which is not equally available to the diverse social groups of parents (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

In connection to this, digital media use is also considered an enrichment activity when co-playing or co-use is discussed, highlighting the socially diverse attitudes towards technology use. However – in line with the findings of Daneels & Vanwynsberghe (2017) –, co-use as a strategy was not typical with this age group.

In terms of other classical parental mediation approaches, we found that parental mediation showed great variability in terms of type, range, and frequency in our sample. However, since parents' perceptions are dominated by their risk awareness, our results – in line with Shin's (2015) findings, – show that restriction is the preferred form of parental mediation. Parents especially use time restrictions, and often restrict the media use of children as a form of punishment. Restrictions were applied regardless of social status, consistent with previous quantitative findings (Nagy et al., 2021; Mascheroni et al., 2016), although higher status parents followed this strategy more consistently and more frequently.

Similarly to Bartau-Rojas and her colleagues' (2018) findings, we found that inappropriate behaviour – mostly in relation to school performance – might result in prohibition. The threats and punishment that we identified are rather reactive strategies. We also found that among lower status parents ad-hoc tactics – consistent with Naab (2018) argument – were more typical than consistent strategies.

In contrast, our results show that restrictions might work in the form of mutually pre-agreed conditions of use (i.e. a consciously applied strategy), typically employed by higher status parents. Parents take this approach because of its effectiveness at decreasing screen time (Naab et al., 2018). However, we argue that, despite the effectiveness of restrictions at mitigating risks, this strategy contradicts contemporary parenting values, particularly in the case of supporting the autonomy of adolescents and reinforcing their capacity for

self-regulation (Steinfeld, 2021). Therefore, similarly to Shin's (2015) finding, our results also show that parents struggle with the contradiction of 'what they do' and 'what they think they should do'. Since the ideal of the contemporary parenting standard involves negotiations about proper behaviour and explanations, this conflict is reflected in the higher status parents' accounts. However, enforcing regulations about media use and controlling children's screen time are very resource-intensive activities and require parents' surveillance. Further, higher status parents involve children in decisions about rules that constantly change and need to be renegotiated. This result strengthens our assumption that a strategy of restrictions is a specific component of intensive parenting, despite its conflicting nature.

Active mediation was typically applied by parents with a high level of education and economic resources, typically living in the capital – typically those who were being self-employed or managers, which is consistent with previous quantitative findings (Nagy et al., 2021; Livingstone et al., 2015; Gee, 2014). Moreover, the latter not only discuss online risks and opportunities with their teenagers, but also co-use screens purposely for enrichment activities. Their active mediation is also expert-guided – in line with intensive parenting model (Hays, 1996) such parents are comprehensively informed; they know of related scientific findings and experts. These parents also have the advantage of supportive educational institutions that organise workshops and thematic programs about proper online behaviour and parental mediation practices for both parents, and children.

In spite of this, these parents also report that they need guidance and information about how to teach their children about the smart use of devices. This reflects Blum-Ross and Livingstone's (2018) critical views of screen-time guidelines, which are considered insufficient for helping parents or promoting children's opportunities.

Monitoring as a classical form of parental mediation was not typical. Generally, many parents disapproved of monitoring, as it is perceived to conflict with their parental values, consistent with Nelson's finding (2010) – especially when teenagers do not know of this. Notwithstanding this, higher status parents had more knowledge about the technical opportunities of this type of control (about new forms of monitoring) – similarly to the result of Daneels and Vanwynsberghe (2017). It was more typical that parents used devices to monitor children than for them to control their online behaviour this way.

Our findings support the hypothesis that the higher level of digital literacy and the patterns of technology use of higher status parents might motivate their strategy of proactive parental mediation, as previous empirical results show (Yuen et al., 2018; Hollingsworth et al., 2011).

We also identified a passive strategy: parents – mostly those of older children and those 's parents and those with lower social status – were rather permissive about children's screen usage. This permissiveness can be differentiated from a strategy of deference – well discussed in the literature (Zaman et al., 2016; Sasson & Mesch, 2014; Padilla, Walker et al., 2012) –, since parents apply the latter to help their children develop their autonomous digital media use. However, in our sample parents rather seemed to lack any tools for influencing their children, which is reflected in their overall perception of digital media and in their resignation about their ability to influence their child's digital media usage. However, it was an important difference that higher status parents seemed to be confident with their permissiveness because of the significance of showing examples to the child in technology management or their earlier navigation with digital devices.

## 6 Conclusion

We can conclude that the intensive parenting ideal shapes parental mediation in a way that parents use high level of control and conscious mediation – with the desired form of active mediation – strategies, 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 these practices are typically employed by higher status parents, our results indicate that navigating children’s media use is a resource-demanding field of parenting, and the competences and resources are unequally divided according to the social status of parents. The remarkable social differences in parental mediation practices show how compliance with this parenting norm can reinforce pre-existing inequalities associated with adolescence and may generate new kinds of social inequalities regarding children’s future development. The research highlights that digital inequity is more liable to involve knowledge about technology management. Moreover, our study highlights the interrelation of screen time and enrichment activities: a strategy of decreasing screen time by providing alternative programs might also reinforce the reproduction of social capital.

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