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From Strictness to Maternal Intuition? Parenting Styles in Czechia from a Historical Perspective

Abstract: This article analyses parenting styles on the basis of thirty-three narrative interviews with mothers from Czechia who raised their children between the 1950s and 1990s. This comparison of different generations has revealed a shift from authoritarian to authoritative parenting styles, including a move from an emphasis on independence, obedience, and the provision of basic physical needs to more child-centered parenting emphasizing an emotional relationship with the child, negotiation, and the child's psychological and physical development. Analysis reveals that parenting is embedded in political, economic, and gender conditions. Moreover, the analysis shows that during the communist era there were increasing differences in parenting styles in connection with socio-economic status. These findings are interpreted as being in line with the development of intensive parenting norms in market economies.

Keywords: qualitative research, parenting styles, intensive motherhood, narrative research

Introduction

The study of parenting, an everyday social practice, has been part of social science research for many years. The focus of this text is to analyze changes in attitudes toward parenting and childcare among women who raised their children between the 1950s and the 1990s. Czechia is of interest due to its major social, political, and economic transformation from a centrally planned economy to a market economy within democratic political structures. Thus, there are distinct differences between the periods. Whether mothers have inclined toward different goals and parenting practices in child upbringing at varying times in the country's history should therefore be ascertainable. This study mostly draws on the concept of parenting styles, which aims to create typologies of parenting and child upbringing according to values, behavior (degree of parental control), and psychological/emotional approach (Smetana 2017). The concept of parenting styles allows for a nuanced examination of how parenting as a social practice is formed by its cultural, gender, and institutional context (Suwada 2021), and is thus also suitable for analyzing changes in parenting practices over time.

In the definitions of parenting styles (e.g., Baumrind's first definition in 1960), the gender dynamics of the parent-child relationship are not primary, and parenting is not seen as a gendered social role (see Suwada 2021; Marková Volejníčková 2018) in the division of household roles, nor as the influence of societal (gendered) expectations of maternal

and paternal caregiving, and nor are different parental approaches to sons and daughters in parenting goals and actual practice addressed. However, I consider child-rearing to be a social practice shaped by cultural, familial, gender, and institutional contexts. Focusing on men's and women's parenting styles separately will thus provide a deeper understanding of how the styles are grounded in these contexts and how they change over time (Biswas and Sharma 2019).

This article will show what changes have occurred in the parent-and-child (specifically mother-and-child) relationship and in parenting styles in historical periods that were full of social, political, and gender-related changes. In my qualitative research, I focused on Czechia from the 1950s to the 1990s and conducted narrative interviews with women who had given birth and raised their children in three different historical periods: (1) the post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s, (2) the normalization period[1] of the 1970s and 1980s, and (3) the early post-communist period of the 1990s and after. These periods are based on gender relations under communism and after, and reflect milestones in the development of Czech society. Each period structured gender relations differently, and it can be assumed that women's participation in distinct social spheres influences their approach to parenthood and childcare (Marková Volejníčková 2021). In each period there were significant changes in, for example, legislation regulating labor or in family law (e.g., financial compensation for mothers on parental leave, changes in the length of parental leave, and state financial support for the family) (Havelková 2017), or changes in gender expectations concerning a woman's role in the household and in regard to childcare (Rákosník and Šustrová 2016). The institutional context that prevailed in each period also determined the opportunities for women to engage in family life and child-rearing. The three periods thus provide a basic framework for an analytical perspective from which to research the parenting styles of mothers. My research questions were as follows: Which aspects of child-rearing (e.g., the development of cognitive skills, the internalization of social values) did mothers consider essential in each of the three periods? What period differences/similarities can be identified in the mothers' narratives of parenting styles? This article contributes to the existing research on parenting by intertwining historical, social, gender, and institutional contexts. It contributes to the theorizing of parenting styles by underscoring their dynamic character. Using narrative interviews enables us to explain how parental practices are developed and shaped in the everyday life of mothers.

Theoretical Background—Parenting Styles in Social Research

Research on parenting styles mostly focuses on defining parenting styles by examining the specific childcare practices and strategies of parents (e.g., Baumrind 1960; Kuppens and Ceulemans 2019). One of the first (now classic) typologies of parenting styles was produced by Diana Baumrind (1960), who distinguished four categories of parenting styles.

[1] "Normalization" refers to the immediate reaction of the Warsaw Pact armies to efforts to democratize the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The reaction included violent suppression, the freezing of democratization processes, and the reinstatement of communist ideology.

(1) Authoritative parenting is characterized by a positive/friendly attitude toward the child, warmth, the expectation of a high level of responsibility, and clear rules at the level of the child's ability to understand and comprehend them. The child's opinions and feelings are considered in this kind of upbringing, and the aim is to promote, develop, and internalize socially recognized rules and values. It is the most widespread type of parenting in Europe and in Western society generally (Pong et al. 2009).
(2) Authoritarian/disciplinarian parenting is typically much less cordial on the part of the parents. Strict rules are employed in upbringing, and obedience is often enforced through punishment. High to excessive parental demands are typically placed on the child, with the goal being blind obedience to authority.
(3) Permissive or indulgent parenting typically features high levels of cordiality and indulgence, with high levels of autonomy for the child. Rules are only employed in extreme cases. Part of the upbringing is an effort to give the child freedom and to be their friend.
(4) Neglectful or uninvolved parenting is characterized by indifferent parental behavior, a lack of parental interest in the child, and no rules.

This method of categorizing parenting styles is still being developed (Rodríguez et al. 2009; Biswas and Sharma 2019).

Current research suggests that parenting styles are fluid and differ according to the gender of parents and children (Conrade and Ho 2011). It has been found (Biswas and Sharma 2019; Suwada 2021) that mothers tend to place more emphasis on the emotional parent-child relationship—the child's feelings are important, and the child's psychological development is at the forefront. Fathers, on the other hand, are stricter. Rules in parenting are important to them, and feelings/emotions are not a key part of the parent-child relationship. Biswas and Sharma (2019) explain this situation through the different gender socialization of parents and the gender division of labor in the family.

Additionally, research has focused on examining how parenting styles are influenced by various factors such as the dominant norms and the cultural model of intensive motherhood (Hays 1996). Intensive motherhood was established as the ideal care model for children in developed countries, including Czechia, during the 1990s. Intensive motherhood emphasizes the mother as having primary responsibility for providing childcare, and thus contact between a mother and child is intensified. Research on parenting styles in the context of intensive motherhood has thus focused on how certain aspects of intensive motherhood, such as the extent to which mothers are involved in childcare, influence children's autonomy (Averett and Griffin 2021). Additionally, research has assessed how intensive motherhood, which is characterized by mothers' devotion of a huge amount of time, energy, and money to raising their children, influences children's physical health and well-being (Yerkes et al. 2019), and their social competence (Egami 2024). Studies have shown that parenting styles are increasingly incorporating aspects of intensive motherhood. I have extended prior studies at the analytical level to assess the manifestations of intensive mothering in mothers' narratives of childcare in different time periods.

However, all of the research mentioned above concordantly shows that parenting styles are influenced by how the ideal of good childcare has changed over time along with the norms associated with good parenting (Gautier et al. 2021). Parenting is thus

situationally conditioned, and parents use different parenting strategies and practices in different situations, usually in a way that reflects the specific goals of parenting (e.g., promoting desirable behavior or socializing the child to important social values) and the needs of the child (Smetana 2017). Parents are not free in regard to what social values they raise their children with and what social skills they cultivate in them (Grusec and Davidov 2014). Thus, the existence of shared views and beliefs about the direction of a child's upbringing can be assumed. Lareau (2011) calls this a cultural repertoire, which she defines as shared beliefs and opinions not only among experts (teachers, pediatricians, psychologists) but also among parents about how children should be raised, and with what values, and how these should be communicated to them (what language to use with children). Parental choices in child-rearing are always tied to a social, cultural, and institutional context that contains an ideal and desirable form of parenting (fatherhood and motherhood).

My analysis focuses on the following levels of parenting styles and intensive motherhood: parenting goals, the extent/intensity/emphasis of the time devoted to a child's psychological development and physical needs, the child's autonomy within the family and society versus parental control, the socialization and internalization of recognized social values, and emotionality in the mother-child relationship. I analyze these aspects in the narratives of women who became mothers in one of three periods defined above in order to explore what parenting styles and practices were typical of that period and whether there was a change in the dominant narratives of parenting styles within the mothers' accounts.

The Social and Institutional Context of Childcare in Czechia

After the Communist Party came to power in 1948, there was a significant change in thinking about women's role in society, the family, and the labor market. In accord with Marxist ideology, the ideal for an emancipated woman was to be free from economic dependence on a husband and free from unpaid household labor (Wagnerová 2017). This was the source of many legal regulations and other measures that emphasized collective childcare (practically immediately after the end of an 18-week parental leave, children were to be placed in nurseries) or that offered educational and labor market[2] support to women (Křížková and Vohlídalová 2009). A discursive analysis of contemporary expert sources (Marková Volejníčková 2021) shows that in the 1950s and 1960s the close relationship between mother and child was not ignored but was used purposefully. Good mothers were expected to put their full efforts toward their jobs. This was the only option they had to ensure the best possible future for their children, that is, by supporting the state economy and providing additional income for the family. While the mothers were at work, the children would be cared for in collective childcare, where they would receive a proper socialist upbringing (with an emphasis on collective work, the reduction of selfishness, etc.)

[2] During the 1950s, the employment rate for women rose by 70%—calculated as a percentage of working women out of the total number of women aged 15 to 54 (*Historical Statistical Yearbook of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic 1985*). The decade saw the implementation of an obligation to work and the criminalization of subsistence living, i.e., a parasitic lifestyle at the cost of the state (Havelková 2017).

(Marková Volejníčková 2021). Although politicians in Czechoslovakia at the time defined women's economic emancipation as a central issue, traditional ideas about gender roles still prevailed: women's emancipation did not affect the private sphere (women increasingly participated in childcare and household duties[3]); women were seen in public opinion surveys as caregivers more than breadwinners (Švarcová and Prokopec 1969); and families themselves often chose family care rather than institutional care for children under three (Hašková and Dudová 2010). Childcare was seen as the responsibility of women; men (fathers) were not expected to be involved. These gendered norms are visible in, for example, the laws regarding parental leave, which could only be taken by women, with men being able to take parental leave only in exceptional cases (Havelková 2017).

In 1950, the Czechoslovak Union of Women (CUW), a state-supported, women-oriented group, was founded. However, its activities were subordinated to state interests, and it promoted the idea of women's emancipation as supported by the state (primary support was for women's entry into the labor market, the equalizing of working conditions with men, liberation from unpaid work) (Ciprová and Sokačová 2009). The CUW was the only women's organization during the communist era, which ended in 1990.

Given the dismal lack of openings in childcare institutions, as well as the lack of goods and services in the centrally planned economy, the growing employment of women led to an excess of working women in the 1960s.[4] Demographers saw a certain correlation between a high female employment rate and a declining birth rate (Srb and Kučera 1959). Above all, negative demographic forecasts prompted the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to create a pro-population plan that included, for example, extending parental leave to 26 weeks, increasing the maternity allowance for full-time care, and financially supporting families with children through tax reductions. Family care was also supported by expert findings on the deprivation of children who are separated early from their mothers in nurseries and on the high rate of illness of children in nurseries and kindergartens (Hašková and Dudová 2010). All this led to an increased emphasis on family care, which was primarily provided by women. The family had regained its social and educational function. It was to be a partner of the socialist state and help cultivate its principles in children, for instance, a willingness to work collectively and to eschew individualism (Bauerová 1979). With maternal care, a child grows into a proper socialist person—healthy, able to work, and free from mental or other illnesses (see Dudová and Hašková 2020). In everyday parenting practice,[5] the implication was that the mother should interrupt her work activities while caring for preschool children, and afterwards she could go back to work again—the so-called sequential model of a life path (Marková Volejníčková 2021). The normalization period following the events of 1968 further encouraged citizens to retreat from the public sphere to the apolitical home sphere, and it was the task of women to protect this safe space (Možný 2009).

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[3] In 1961, men spent 2 hours per day and women 5.2 hours per day doing household chores (Stíbalová 1965).

[4] The subjectively perceived burden of the housework was felt most by women aged 30 to 44 years (54%) but only 9% of men (Stíbalová 1965).

[5] 67% of the population agreed that a woman should go to work even if she had children. However, an increase to 20% was recorded for the statement that a woman should not go to work but should care for children (Bauerová and Bártová 1987, research from 1977–1980).

In Czechia, the 1989 end of socialism and the beginning of democracy were characterized by a growing familial model of childcare and an upbringing known as explicit familism, which involved overt support for caregivers at home (e.g., paid parental leave and other allowances for childcare or familial care) (Leitner 2003). Owing to the country's communist regime, feminist activism was limited, if not completely interrupted, before 1989. During the 1990s, the first feminist groups emerged, but unfortunately, their focus and the issues they addressed were not in line with the political and civic rhetoric of the 1990s. After 2000, with the increased stabilization and professionalization of the non-profit sector, there was a focus on gender issues, which gradually amplified the critical voice in mainstream discourse. However, the ability of such groups to influence civil society is still limited (Ciprová and Sokačová 2009).

The political measures of the 1990s included the extension of paid parental leave to as many as three years (the leave still taken by most Czech women today), and the closure of childcare institutions (especially day nurseries), as unwanted communist relics that had negatively affected children by separating them from their mothers too early. Such measures led to more intensive home-based childcare[6] and to reduced use of childcare institutions by employed parents, as well as to greater stress for women, who must combine both work and care. Mothers now reflect more on the difficulties associated with a work-life balance and perceive the spheres of family and work to be incompatible. Public opinion, political measures, and the small amount of lobbying on gender issues by the non-profit sector tend to favor long-term care for children at home, performed by women (Marková Volejníčková 2021). Women themselves are for the first time associating motherhood with biological aspects of the female body (pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding) and are using the rhetoric of maternal instinct and intuition (Marková Volejníčková 2021). Already in the 1990s, some features of intensive mothering (Hays 1996) can be recognized, such as education in child-rearing and home care by the mother, but fathers are excluded.

In this article, I do not focus directly on parenting norms or how ideal parenting/motherhood/childcare has been defined and formed in the history of Czechia. Rather, I focus on how mothers reflect and describe their parenting styles in three specific periods and in specific social, political, and gender conditions. I suggest that mothers are aware of their parenting styles as well as ideal mothering norms and that there are shared beliefs, opinions, and goals about child-rearing that determine how a child should be raised to behave (see Lareu 2011). Culturally well-known rhetoric and norms are always present in narratives because our self-presentation is always shaped by what is considered "ideal" (in this case, a parenting style/childcare ideal) in a given culture and society (Edley 2011). Mothers are influenced by the dominant representation and discourses of motherhood presented in the image of ideal motherhood (Lomax and Fink 2010). The cultural repertoires of mothering are, to some extent, contained in the periodization created for this analysis. Thus, it was possible to observe how the interviewed mothers constructed their parenting styles in

[6] After 1989, almost 90% of mothers with a child under three years of age worked only part time. Contrarily, in the post-war period (1950s/1960s) about 16% of mothers and, in the normalization period (1970s/1980s) between 25%–36% of mothers were at home for up to three years, and a significant part of them returned to full-time work; a smaller part returned to part-time work (Hašková 2011).

the context of these repertoires, what they considered crucial in child-rearing, and what parenting practices they recounted in their narratives.

Research Methodology

This article is based on an analysis of 33 narrative interviews conducted between 2015 and 2016 with Czech women, see Table 1 in the Annex (all the interviews took place and were analyzed in Czech, and only certain passages from the interviews were translated into English). The main criterion for the selection of narrators was that the woman must have had a child and raised it in one of the three above-defined periods. In the post-war and normalization periods, the research sample was relatively homogeneous in terms of education, age at birth of a first child, and socioeconomic/marital status, because the demographic structure of the population was homogeneous in those periods.[7] One or two of the narrators from those two periods had a tertiary degree and high socio-economic status. In the post-communist group, the narrators were more differentiated by education, socio-economic status, and the age at which they gave birth to their first child.

In the narrative interviews, I specifically used the problem-centered interview method (Witzel and Reiter 2012). This allowed me to overcome the issue of researcher input in the interviewee's narrative (since a free narrative is the goal of narrative interviews) and to structure the narrative flow to keep the focus on the research topic. Interviews began with a prompt to narrate freely about the research topic (in my case, the interviews always started with the question "What happened in your life when you became a mother?" and then issues and experiences of interest were selected from these first narratives. Further narratives were encouraged similarly (Witzel and Reiter 2012). This way of conducting narrative interviews, which allows for limited researcher input into the interview, is appropriate when we require a retrospective narrative. Specific options can be used to stimulate memory: these include (a) asking a new and differently formulated question for a more detailed narrative on a topic already discussed by the narrators; (b) using additional questions to ensure that the researcher understands the answer; (c) evoking a situation, for example, by recalling the weather, clothing, or feelings at the time (see also Wengraf 2001); or (d) recalling a significant historical event. As Vaněk et al. (2007) point out, our memory is also structured by these events; people often remember what they were doing at a given historical moment because the historical moment is, again and again, recalled throughout their lives. It is also necessary to mention the specificity of my study: as a person born in 1989, I did not live under communism, and I experienced the 1990s as a child. Many narrators, because of my age, tended to explain to me certain customs or specifics of a given historical period in order to improve my understanding. I believe all of these tools helped to stimulate their memories.

When analyzing the interviews, I read the interview transcripts and prepared a list of the topics to which the narrators gave the most importance. The aim was to understand

[7] As late as 1961, only 20.6% of women studied at university (Fukalová 1967). In 1970/1971, 40.3% of women were already studying at university (*Historical Statistical Yearbook of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic 1971*). Despite many state measures to raise the educational level of women, it has grown gradually.

the structure of the narratives. Then, as Witzel and Reiter (2012) argued, it is necessary to focus on the biographical aspect of interviews and analyze how the narrators formulate their stories, which aspects they emphasize and how they describe their daily routines in raising a child. The core of the codebook drew on studies that examined selected aspects of parenting styles in the context of intensive motherhood (see Yerkes et al. 2019; Egami 2024), which has become the dominant childcare model in Czechia and beyond since the 1990s, and on research (see Rodríguez et al. 2009; Smetana 2017) that understands parenting styles as gendered and socially and culturally shaped (i.e., as changing over time). This enabled me to focus on development and change in parenting styles in Czechia since the 1950s and also to analyze specific parenting styles typical of each period. In my analysis, I focused on the following aspects of parenting styles: the degree of parental control and child autonomy in the family and in society, emotionality in the mother-child relationship (its manifestation, importance, etc.), the demands of childrearing (temporal, financial, and emotional), the extent of and emphasis on time devoted to the child's psychological or physical needs, and the goals of childrearing and manifestations of intensive motherhood in the mother's story. I analyzed these aspects in the reflections, descriptions in the mothers' narratives in all three time periods.

Results of the Narrative Interview Analysis—from Strictness to Maternal Intuition?

The post-war period (1950s/1960s)

This period was characterized by problems with the provision of basic necessities (no hot water in the home, only wood heating), the poor economic situation of families, and the lack of housing. The mothers' parenting practices were deeply connected with their poor living conditions. Mothers from small towns and villages also mentioned the poor social services available to them (a lack of nursery/preschool places, long distances between their residence and work, few grocery stores, etc.). For many women, this was the reason they stayed at home with their child longer than the 18 weeks of paid maternity leave (often until the child was two or three years old) while trying to earn extra money by, for example, sewing, knitting, crocheting, and so forth. Raising and caring for preschool children was very demanding for them. The fact that their daily routine was largely determined by the provision of necessities was also reflected in their child-raising goals, which mainly concerned the child's independence, for instance, for the child to be able to play on its own:

> He was good, playing with something by himself while I was cooking […], I had this huge laundry basket, so I put him there and he stayed there—he had to. (Ludmila)

For many mothers, the child was already independent at the age of three:

> I didn't need help from the neighbors; he was already three years old; he was already a big boy. (Stela)

The age of three was perceived in expert debates and family policy (see Hašková and Dudová 2010) as old enough for a child to be able to separate from the caregiver

(mother) without consequences and to be able to attend formal childcare. Thus, even mothers expected a certain maturity in three-year-old children.

Other child-rearing goals of the post-war mothers included the setting and observance of relatively strict rules (regarding mealtimes, bathing, sleeping, etc.) and obedience, especially to parental authority (and later also to that of teachers). It was evident in the narratives that mothers expected that even a small child would immediately do what it was told. The mothers also expected that children would be obedient while in childcare institutions. Trust in these institutions was evident from the benefits of collective care mentioned by the mothers—they were places where a child could learn what the mother did not have time to teach it at home, and they helped with child-rearing. A child's compliance with the rules and daily regime was often enforced by physical punishment in the form of a slap or a spank on the bottom. The interviewees considered physical punishment to be a correct or desirable parenting practice:

I was a strict mother. My husband would always say "Wait until your mom gets home, she'll deal with you." I was really tough with them; otherwise, I wouldn't have made it. (Vlasta)

Vlasta's statement, "I wouldn't have made it," mainly referred to the need to manage a full-time job while taking care of two small children. Vlasta also mentioned the problem of finding housing, especially safe and healthy housing, because she and her husband, after the birth of their first child, lived in a moldy converted basement. Such conditions were part of the complicated living situations that had to be taken into consideration by post-war mothers when raising their children.

Vlasta's story also points to the position of fathers in the narrators' stories about raising children. Fathers were mentioned "in passing" in the narratives (e.g., Vlasta and her husband were looking for a better place to live), not as active actors influencing or co-creating parenting styles. The assignment of an invisible role to fathers in childcare reflects the discourse of the time. For example, the Family Law allowed fathers almost no parental leave or financial support during childcare (Havelková 2017).

The emphasis on obedience and independence was also reflected in the emotional mother-child relationship. Intense manifestations of affection or cuddling were perceived negatively as they were supposed to undermine obedience and respect. Thus, the discourse of the time, which emphasized working in a collective and eliminating expressions of selfishness, may have been projected here:

You must give a child love but also keep them within limits […]. If women don't act with that goal in mind, then they shouldn't be surprised if the child slaps them at 15. (Vlasta)

The parenting styles of all the interviewed mothers of the post-war period showed almost identical characteristics and can be described as authoritarian or disciplinarian. The parenting style was mostly characterized by strictness, which manifested itself in the mothers' emphasis on independence in childrearing (which increased with age) and obedience (to the point of blindness) to parents and school, which was enforced by physical punishment. Emphasis was placed on the internalization of, and strict compliance with, social values. The mothers' narratives were intensely concerned with the provision of basic physical needs (warmth, food, and a healthy, safe home), which influenced their parenting practices (as manifested through their emphasis on their children's independence and obedience).

The normalization period (1970s/1980s)

In this period, parenting practices such as strictness, an emphasis on independence, and rules were still present. However, their intensity was mainly influenced by the socio-economic status of the mothers. Four of the interviewed mothers from this period were college educated, and two had a higher socio-economic status due primarily to their husbands, who were world-renowned scientists and physicians. The other mothers had, at the most, a secondary school diploma and, in their narratives, referred to financial scarcity, financial support from family, or cohabitation with their parents for several years. The narratives of these mothers were very similar to those from the post-war period and mainly emphasized the difficult living conditions. The mothers emphasized obedience and rules (regarding eating behavior, and sleep times), but physical punishment—as a parenting practice aimed at producing obedience in a child—was criticized by many mothers:

A kid used to have to obey—nobody beat him, but he just had to obey […]. Our mom was an authority […] because she would tell us three times and then she gave us a few slaps […]. But I, for example, used to hit the table with a wooden spoon and make a terrible noise, but I didn't hit my children, no. (Božena)

Božena still emphasized that children must be obedient, but the strategies she used to obtain this aim (e.g., hitting the table with a spoon) were different from those of the post-war mothers. Probably changes such as the increasing criticism of early separation for children, and the welcoming of care by the mother (Hašková and Dudová 2010), or new laws financially supporting families with children or increasing the length of parental leave (Havelková 2017), were becoming embedded in the parenting style of these mothers of the normalization period. All these changes reinforced maternal care in the home and thus determined an increasing portion of the mothers' life trajectories. Such changes produced a type of parenting that contrasted with one where physical punishment was used as a response to coping with complicated life conditions.

A different parenting style was described by mothers with higher education and socio-economic status. They tried to provide their children with as many experiences as possible (such as sports, culture, trips, etc.) and highlighted the necessity of responding to what the child needed. These women were among the few narrators to mention their child's father explicitly in their narratives—in particular, they emphasized his high socio-economic status, which enabled them to have a different parenting style than women with lower socio-economic status. Their narratives still placed emphasis on rules in parenting, but the rules were not strictly enforced and were first explained to the children:

You have to give a lot of attention to children […] but children like order, and you have to guide them, teach [them] and constantly repeat it to them (Zora).

An emphasis on the child's psychological development and individuality, and respect for the child's needs, now appear in the mothers' narratives:

When I had small children, there was no consideration for the individuality of the child […] for example, the rule of breastfeeding every three hours is not enough for everyone—some children are hungry, and some are not […]. There were no toys that develop children's intellect. You had to do that on your own, for example, building a kit with the children, or we read to them a lot. (Karina)

From Karina's statement, it is obvious that mothers emphasized the development and needs of the child, and their higher socio-economic status enabled them to do so to some extent. They were able to spend time with their children somewhat according to their wishes (trips together, playtime), but it also influenced their view of ideal child-rearing, which up to a certain age should be carried out in the home and ideally by the mother. Their parenting practices were similar to an authoritative parenting style and were characterized by an emphasis on the child's individuality/psychological development. Adherence to rules, which were explained to the child in a way it could understand, were required. These mothers less often formed their parenting style on the basis of strictness. The change in parenting style during the normalization period is particularly obvious among those mothers with higher education and higher socio-economic status. Conversely, the parenting style of mothers with lower socio-economic status and education was primarily still based on strictness and obedience (though without physical punishment), and thus showed more characteristics of the authoritarian/disciplinarian parenting style. What the two groups of mothers had in common was an emphasis on the internalization of the accepted social values of the period (working in a team, not getting spoiled, selflessness). It was the strategies and practices intended to fulfil this parenting goal that differed.

The post-communist period (1990 and after)

Of course, the analysis reveals that, in this period as well, parenting styles were determined by the socio-economic status of the women and their educational attainment (Marková Volejníčková 2018). Of more interest are the goals the mothers set for themselves in child rearing, what strategies they used to achieve them, and how they described their parenting style. Many attitudes, as I will show, first appear only in the narratives of this group of mothers. For the first time, mothers connected motherhood with an emphasis on the emotional relationship with the child, saw the child as their "purpose in life," and often referred to intuition, maternal instinct, or a natural bond between mother and child that guided their parenting and childcare. These parenting-style characteristics appear only in the narratives of women who were mothers during the post-communist period:

> When a mother listens to her intuition and the nature of a child and perceives the child's feedback, it's right […]. My relatives told me, "Don't carry her in your arms, she'll be spoiled." But I naturally felt that my daughter needed [me to do] it differently. (Františka)

As the quote from Františka shows, the argument for situated parenting, where mothers respond to the child's current needs and feelings and then modify their parenting and care according to those needs, also enters into parenting styles here. Parenting was understood as a process, not as an unchanging social role. Mothers emphasized that they were still learning and said that the relationship with the child changes according to needs and mood but also the age of the child and changes in the family (another child joins the family, or the child starts kindergarten or school, etc.):

> You learn with your child the entire time […]. Our child is still teaching me and my husband that sometimes you have to step back from your ideas. For example, I didn't want my son to eat chocolate, and then he ate it, and nothing happened. (Zdislava)

What does not disappear from the mothers' narratives about their parenting styles is the emphasis on rules in parenting; the changes are in how the rules were established. Whereas in the post-war period and for the most part in the normalization period it was more about the child's obedience and respect for established rules (often enforced through physical punishment), now the rules are seen as changeable, and their realization is based on the child's needs.

The narratives on parenting styles in this period also include discussion about the child's psychological and physical development through toys, interactive games, playgroups, and other after-school activities:

> I sang prenatal songs […] and then I used classic things, such as toys and blankets that stimulate child development, painting, books, and later they started playing musical instruments. We also went to dancing classes and swimming. (Ema)

The emphasis on psychological well-being and the development of specific skills through special toys and after-school activities had become a large part of the parenting styles of mothers in the third period. Mothers were not only expected to provide children with these experiences but to educate themselves about what is appropriate for children. This finding correlates with the research findings of Lareau (2011) and her concept of "concerted cultivation"—that is, the intensification of childcare with an emphasis on structuring children's leisure activities, developing language skills, and active parental intervention in the expression of children's individualized needs.

In the post-communist period, the authoritative parenting style prevails and is typified by a high degree of responsibility; clear rules in accord with the child's ability to understand them; and respect for the child's needs, opinions, and feelings. At the same time, such characteristics of intensive mothering (Hays 1996) as the perception of motherhood as a life purpose, the fulfilment of a child's needs, the accent on child development, and expert knowledge of childcare, are an important part of the parenting style of post-communist mothers. Moreover, these mothers discussed their perceptions of the real involvement of fathers in childcare, even though they identified themselves as the primary caregivers through natural bonding or maternal intuition (Hays 1996).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article is a contribution to the discussion on how parenthood is shaped by historical and social contexts. I have focused on the parenting styles of mothers in Czechia and analyzed the development and changes in attitudes toward parenting and childcare in the narratives of mothers who raised their children in one of three periods: (1) the post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s, (2) the normalization period of the 1970s and 1980s, and (3) the early post-communist period of the 1990s and after. This comparison of different generations has revealed a shift from authoritarian to authoritative parenting styles (see Baumrind 1967), including a move from strict parenting, with an emphasis on independence, obedience, and the provision of basic physical needs, to a more child-centered parenting style emphasizing maternal intuition, an emotional relationship with the child, negotiation, and the child's

psychological and physical development. This article shows that parenting styles, goals, and practices are strongly responsive to social, economic, and gender conditions. Parenting and its practices are thus highly adaptive and influenced by external conditions. In the case at hand, parenting changed over the relatively short interval of the three selected periods. As an example of the rapid adaptation of parenting styles, the attitude to a child's individuality can be mentioned as an aspect of parenting styles. In the 1950s, the child's individuality was to be suppressed in the name of collective identity (see Možný 2009). Contrarily, in the 1990s, the child's individuality became the goal of parenting, and parents were tasked with developing and cultivating it (see Lareau 2011).

This analysis contributes to understanding the birth and formation of parenting styles. By leveraging literature that analyzed selected aspects of parenting styles within the dominant normative framework of ideal childcare, usually in the context of intensive motherhood (Yerkes et al. 2019; Egami 2024), the analysis has revealed the origins of intensive motherhood in Czechia. The research suggests that the start of intensive motherhood (Hays 1996) in Czechia is associated with the political, societal, expert, or gender conditions of the 1970s and 1980s. This period emphasized the benefits of home-based care by mothers for the sake of children's physical health and well-being (Hašková and Dudová 2010). Thus, the family became a partner of the regime, and families were expected to work together in cultivating socialist principles and values in children (Marková Volejníčková 2021). This opened new possibilities for women to perceive and realize parenting styles that were contrary to expectations. However, only those women with higher socio-economic status were able to benefit fully from the conditions of this period and engage in the development of the child through activities and toys. Additionally, this period emphasized mothers' presence in their children's lives and the fulfilment of the children's needs. Surprisingly, this study found that the beginnings of intensive motherhood in Czechia started in the communist era, particularly among mothers with higher socio-economic status. While intensive motherhood was shown, as expected, to have become the norm after 1989 (see Hašková and Dudová 2010), socio-economic status thus appears to have been one of the main factors affecting parenting styles that allowed certain groups of women to experience parenthood differently. Thus, this article contributes to the discussion of the impact of socio-economic status under communism (in a supposedly classless and homogeneous society) and how it differentiated opportunities among citizens—in this case, mothers and their approaches to parenthood. The research further shows that intensive motherhood emerged through a process similar to the one identified by Hays (1996) in the United States, a country with a different political, historical, and economic development. In future research, it would be interesting to focus on what conditions (political, economic, gender, etc.) are necessary for intensive motherhood to become the norm and the ideal of childcare in different social, political, and historical contexts.

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Annex

Table 1

Characteristics of the narrators

Pseudonym	Historical period	Number of children	Education	Date of birth
Stela	1	1	Secondary	1935
Sára	1	2	Primary	1941
Ludmila	1	1	Primary	1941
Olivie	1	2	Vocational	1941
Matylda	1	2	Primary	1933
Ida	1	2	Vocational	1931
Elena	1	2	Secondary	1924
Dita	1	2	Secondary	1926
Žofie	1	1	Vocational	1939
Eleonor	1	2	Secondary	1942
Vlasta	1	2	Secondary	1935
Anastázie	2	2	Tertiary	1949
Radoslava	2	3	Tertiary	1949
Božena	2	3	Vocational	1944
Simona	2	1	Tertiary	1938
Karina	2	2	Tertiary	1946
Zora	2	2	Secondary	1948
Františka	3	2	Tertiary	1978
Anežka	3	1	Secondary	1967
Gabriela	3	4	Secondary	1972
Vanda	3	1	Secondary	1967
Cecílie	3	1	Secondary	1968
Zdislava	3	1	Tertiary	1979
Bohdana	3	1	Secondary	1963
Rozálie	3	1	Secondary	1978
Pavlína	3	2	Vocational	1967
Saša	3	2	Secondary	1966
Diana	3	3	Tertiary	1972
Zorka	3	4	Vocational	1965
Běla	3	2	Tertiary	1975
Valerie	3	4	Tertiary	1967
Renata	3	1	Secondary	1967
Ema	3	2	Tertiary	1975

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