Parenting in screen times

Negotiations, practices and experiences in everyday family life

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Abstract:

This dissertation is about modern-day parenting in relation to what is commonly known as screen time. While screen time in everyday language is used to connote activities on screen technologies, it has become a phenomenon which often describes a site of struggle, uncertainty and frustration in the domestic space (Livingstone & Blum-Ross 2020; Sandberg et al. 2024a). Parents are expected to manage and control screen activities in their family's everyday life, which often results in increased pressures in the day-to-day. Children are often seen as especially vulnerable, which extends to screens and media use (Lafton et al. 2023). At the same time, the mundane everyday is a site of coherence and routines (Bausinger 1984), a place of simply living. Parents navigate this everyday from their own vantage points, which makes their experiences unique. The subjective experience within this intersubjective life-world (Schütz & Luckmann 1973) is central in this study to understand how the parents negotiate, experience and manage screen time in their everyday life. While screen time is a criticized term, it is in this dissertation to be understood as it is used in daily language, and how the parents themselves make sense of it. In semi-structured interviews with a total of 35 parents, this contemporary everyday is explored. The central theoretical framework is based on Alfred Schütz's (1970; Schütz & Luckmann 1973) social phenomenology, David Morgan's (2011) notion of parenting as something continuously being 'done' in practice, Hilary Putnam's (1990) arguments on morality, and ideals around contemporary parenting, based mainly on Sharon Hays' (1996) and Frank Furedi's (2008) arguments around "intensive parenting" and "paranoid parenting". The arguments made in the dissertation illustrate how parents engage in moral negotiations around screen time, where they engage with the phenomenon in ways that are subjective (their own accumulated knowledge and experiences), intersubjective (their children, other parents and the changing everyday contexts) and horizonal (state recommendations and public discourses surrounding the phenomenon). In accepting that media is now an integral part of daily life, parents engage in routinization work, attempting to assimilate screen time into their everyday amongst the ensemble of other mundane activities. This makes screen time attain special meaning, at times attempted to be 'naturalized' and less visible in daily life, other times it remains a site of struggle. This creates ambivalent and paradoxical ideas around how screen time actually fits into the parents' life-worlds. Moreover, the negotiations often draw and reproduce contemporary parenting ideals, which are intensely child focused (especially on health and child development) and a site of many uncertainties and doubts around what is the 'best' parenting practice. However, some parents are also seen resisting these ideals, while at the same time illustrating that they still relate to them. Situated in the Swedish context, the study contributes to the existing empirical body of work on parents and screen time in Media and Communication studies (see Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2018; Jeffrey 2021a; Willett 2023; Sandberg et al. 2024a; 2024b), while adding further dimensions of morality, practices and contemporary parenting ideals to it.

Key words: Parenting, parenthood, everyday life, screen time, morality, good parenthood, media practices, parental negotiations, subjective experience, reflexivity, phenomenology, intensive parenting, paranoid parenting, social class

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LUNDS UNIVERSITET

Till Sara, mamma och pappa

Table of Contents

Abstract

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how contemporary parenthood can be understood through parents' experiences and negotiations of 'screen time' in an increasingly media-saturated everyday life. Screen time, commonly understood as time spent in front of screen technologies, represents a modern-day phenomenon that remains central to many parents' daily routines (Sandberg et al. 2024a). In contemporary Western cultures, parents are expected to navigate a myriad of complex questions regarding their children and family life (Furedi 2008), not least around media use in everyday life.[1] Media now permeates everyday life as "often-unnoticed" phenomena, though it is still often a source of conflict (Damkjaer et al. 2021). In response to the Public Health Agency of Sweden's 2024 recommendations on screen time for young children (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2024), a local Swedish newspaper published an article titled "Well-grounded and important – or far too problem focused and general?" (Werner 2024).[2] The article sheds light on how perceived dichotomies around screen time are often articulated and expressed. Similar to the debate in many other Western countries, the Swedish debate surrounding screen time has focused on the perceived harmful effects of (supposedly) excessive use of screen-based technologies among children and young people. Several Swedish mass media outlets commented on the recommendations in various ways, publishing headlines and debate articles such as "Reduce children's screen time – in a sustainable way" (Dagens Nyheter 2024), "What parents in Kalmar think about the new screen time advice: It's difficult" (Alvhäll Lindahl 2024), "Just admit that the screens are a babysitter" (Magnusson 2024), "Negative effects from significant

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[1] In this thesis I use the term 'media use' consistently, parallel with the more specific term 'media practices'. However, media use is sometimes associated with the Uses and Gratifications-tradition and functionalism, and as such has been criticized. In this text it is simply used as an everyday language shorthand for the myriads of interactions people have with media. I aim to return to this question in the conclusion.

[2] Translated from Swedish: "*Välgrundade och viktiga – eller alltför problemfokuserade och generella?*".

screen time" (Alexandersson 2024) and "We have to take smart phones away from children" (Dodd Syk & Schnittger 2024).[3] While the articles themselves refer to recommendations and public debates on screen time within Sweden, they reflect a broader trend of increasing calls for intervention and restriction, which often assign full blame and responsibility to parents and caregivers. In this dissertation, the parental perspective is adopted, exploring screen time as part of parents lived experiences, practices and meaning-making processes in their everyday lives.

In many ways, the digitalization of everyday life has delivered on its promises of increased freedom and more streamlined experiences in work and leisure. It has also transformed many facets of our social lives. New communication technologies have expanded social arenas through messaging, video calls and multi-player online games. The question, then, is why discussions around phenomena such as screen time, online gaming and social media leave many people uneasy or anxious. In addition to the opportunities these technologies offer, they are also perceived as potentially harmful, be it psychologically, socially or medically (Santos & Reeve 2020). The perception that screen technology use is excessive or influences people through violent and undesirable content often overshadows the intended benefits, namely, improvements in everyday life, increased freedom and new modes of sociality. Children are often seen as especially vulnerable when it comes to health-related issues (Lupton 2013), including everyday practices such as screen and media use (Lafton et al. 2023). The increased social individualization that is thought to be a by-product of increased media use is often cited as part of the problem (Turkle 2011; Nikken 2022). However, screen time has during 2020s come under scrutiny from many angles, which has led to arguments that specific online practices (such as cyber bullying) are the *actual* problem area concerning young people and mental health, not the overly generalized screen time label (UNICEF 2025).

Screen time and media use are also seen as obstacles to the development of social skills and social life in general. Parents and caregivers are thus ultimately responsible for managing screen devices and how they are used by their children, along with the content accessed on them, while "often express[ing] uncertainty

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[3] Translated from Swedish: "*Minska barnets skärmtid – på ett hållbart sätt*", "*Så tycker föräldrar i Kalmar om nya skärmtidsråden*: '*Det är svårt*'", "*Erkänn bara att skärmarna är en barnvakt*", "*Negativ påverkan av mycket skärmtid*" and "*Vi måste ta de smarta telefonerna från barnen.*"

about the right strategy" (Zerle-Elsäßer et al. 2023:365).[4] In this way, parents within the family context contribute significantly to shaping "the media ecology for children" (Nikken 2022:339). Parental practices around screen time include controlling, monitoring and regulating children's screen use, as well as educational dimensions, which typically involve domestic devices such as smart phones, tablets, computers and televisions. Parents are thus expected to navigate policies, be sufficiently informed (Ramaekers & Hodgson 2020) and protect their children from digital threats (Schofield Clark 2013; Livingstone & Blum-Ross 2020). It is no wonder, then, that screen time, as a contemporary connotation of media use, has become a "highly controversial concept" (Sandberg et al. 2024a).

While the hypothesized harmful dimensions of media use and screen time have been extensively studied, "research on screen time does not acknowledge the unique behavioral context and users" (Pontes 2021). It is therefore essential to address the unique values, practices and contexts within which parents navigate their everyday lives. Rather than focusing on the presumed harmful health effects of screen use, the present study examines parents' subjective experiences as a starting point. Central to this undertaking is examining the ways in which parents negotiate norms and values surrounding screen time within the family context. However, ideals and norms around screen time do not develop out of thin air and are not solely (or independently) produced through parental experiences. In this study, I will relate parental experiences to the contexts of ideals and norms that characterize contemporary parenthood.

Understanding parental experiences requires recognizing the many contexts in which parenting is 'done' (see Morgan 2011). One such context is the expectation on parents to navigate the recommendations and public discourse around screen time. Following the decision to introduce video game addiction as a psychological disorder in the DSM-5, the WHO published recommendations in 2019 for screen use among young children. The recommendations state that children under the age of two should completely avoid screen use, while children between two and five should have a maximum of one hour of screen time per day (WHO 2019). The WHO recommendations were motivated by the desire to combat the

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[4] In this dissertation, I generally talk about parents rather than caregivers when referring to my empirical material, even though I am aware of the complexity of family lives, relationships and other care-giver contexts and constellations (such as foster homes). The simple explanation is that the 35 interviewed individuals in this study are all identified as parents within their families.

growing issue of childhood obesity. Similar recommendations were then put in place in Sweden during the mid-2020s (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2024). In another example from the same time period, Australia put a ban on social media for anyone under the age of sixteen (eSafetyCommisioner 2025), citing the risks as potentially detrimental to young people's "sleep, stress levels and attention." Parents are continually expected to heed suggestions and recommendations on how do parenting 'right' regarding media use and screen technologies, raising questions about how such ideas of ideals and norms are experienced by parents themselves. There is a notion that "[p]arents take on, and often amplify, the abundant and fearful claims that screen time is damaging their children physically and mentally" (Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2018:179). This claim places the perceived harm caused by smartphones, tablets and computers at the forefront of the discussion.

This situation could be seen as painting a bleak picture of modern family life in relation to media. This dissertation sets out to broaden the discussion on screen time, providing perspectives that might be lost when focusing too narrowly on perceived harms and risks. However, many parents are genuinely worried about screen use in the family, a concern that is part of the reflexivity of being a parent. The work within this dissertation instead emphasizes the subjective reality of parents, who live their everyday lives surrounded by, and living with, these ideas. The dissertation is, as such, neither a celebration of the development of media as a source of collective production and increased freedom, such as the collaborative and democratic Web 2.0 described by Gauntlett (2011), nor is it a call for action regarding presumed harmful media practices. As an alternative perspective, Schofield Clark (2013) asks in The Parent App: Understanding Families in the Digital Age: "[W]hat are parents doing to help their children prepare to live as happy, independent, productive, and caring human beings in the digital age?" (Schofield Clark 2013:3). This question concerns everyday parental negotiations and practices as parents strive to do the 'best' for their children, in a world overflowing with media technology and content.

The issues explored in this dissertation are similar to the questions explored by Schofield Clark (2013). However, the emphasis here is on how parents themselves experience the daily work of child-rearing through the specific lens of screen time. What might initially appear to be a simple question quickly reveals itself to be infinitely complex in nature, as everyday practices, ideals, negotiations,

contradictions, ambivalences and norms are taken into account. This encompasses ideals and norms around parenting and parenthood in relation to digital media technology, and more specifically, what is perceived and experienced as screen time. The emphasis here is placed on parenthood as a symbiotic relationship between practices and ideals, where neither exists separately from the other. The physical and digital existence on and in screen devices, as well as the ideas circulating around them, should not be understood as a demarcation of specific media practices. A focus on experience allows for an understanding where these ways of existing do not constitute a separate sphere of human life, instead, [i]t is always both (Markham 2020).

Aims and objectives

Several contemporary studies have covered media use and parenting from a social perspective, including recent studies in the UK (Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2018; 2020), Australia (Jeffrey 2021a; 2021b), the US (Schofield Clark 2013; Willett & Wheeler 2021; Willett 2023) and Sweden (Sandberg et al. 2021; 2024a; 2024b). These studies often cover ground that includes screen time as a phenomenon, whether it be implicitly or explicitly. This dissertation should be seen as a contribution to the field of parenting and media in everyday life, as well as an undertaking to elaborate on certain aspects within this field of study. Adopting a phenomenological perspective as an ontological approach to understanding daily life, the present study views screen time as a phenomenon that shapes parental experiences, providing insight into how parents ascribe value and create meaning around this specific phenomenon. Accordingly, the study relies on in-depth interviews to explore contemporary parenthood through parents' negotiations and everyday family experiences around the phenomenon of screen time in a Swedish context. This dissertation provides insight into how screen time is experienced, negotiated and subsequently managed by the participants themselves, a group that is often less visible in public discourse. This includes attitudes and negotiations around screen time practices and, to a lesser degree, the related technologies, as well as the contexts in which these negotiations take place. Parenting means that children, family life and the domestic space are all central contexts and themes for understanding these attitudes and negotiations. By applying this perspective, more can be learned about the social and moral contexts, as well as the meanings of screen time, as embedded in parents' everyday

life. Such an understanding inevitably also conveys something about the lives of a specific group of individuals, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which they act at a particular point in time.

There is a long tradition of research that examines people's everyday lives across a multitude of disciplines, and this dissertation should be understood as part of that tradition. By studying and attempting to understand the mundane everyday, researchers uncover the minutiae that permeate, direct and influence daily life. While an institutional or structural perspective could illustrate dimensions of social phenomena "as a set of structural arrangements," an everyday life perspective sees social life "as a moving and dynamic entity that has a rhythm and a temporality" (Back 2015:820). This type of investigation includes the parents' own ideas around norms and values, performed practices and the contexts in which these practices take place. This ranges from how and why parents manage their children's screen time to what they imagine are the 'right' and 'wrong things to do. Understanding the complex lived experiences of parents provides additional insights into how parents navigate daily life within social and cultural norms and values, as well as how they themselves constitute certain aspects of these norms and values. Below are the research questions that have been central to this dissertation.

- How do parents experience and negotiate the screen time phenomenon in their everyday lives?

- In what ways are parents' 'doing of parenthood' constitutive of moral negotiations around screen time, and subsequent practices, and how do these relate to contemporary parenting ideals?

- How can parents' experiences around screen time be understood in relation to other agents (such as other people, recommendations, and public discourses)?

This study is based on in-depth interviews with 35 parents, which have been conducted both in person and with digital tools such as Zoom. The interviews (25 sessions in total) where conducted with individual parents and couples.[5] In the interviews, lasting between approximately one hour and one and a half hours, all parents were asked to reflect on their family's and children's screen time, as well as how screen time fits into their everyday lives. As an analytical tool the

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[5] The method and methodological questions will be explored further in Chapter 3.

concept of 'negotiations' is central to this dissertation. Negotiations should be understood here as the ways in which parents make decisions regarding their family's media use. Furthermore, negotiations inform the subsequent actions, or practices, which shape their lived everyday lives, their life-worlds and their experiences. The research questions should be understood as intertwined, while still demarcated to allow for several approaches to the material. The first question encompasses much of the empirical presentation and is ontological and exploratory in nature, rather than exclusively theoretical. Here, a theoretical framework is used to understand the more descriptive presentations of the empirical material through the parents' own voices. The second question focuses on the 'doing of parenthood'; that is, how parents, through parental practices, construct values and ideals regarding parenthood and family life (see Morgan 2011). This question also entails exploring the negotiations on which these practices are based. The third and final question explores the parents' relationships with the surrounding world and the intersubjective life-world in which they act.

Point of departure: Understanding parental experiences

Besides parenting and parenthood, three further, and interconnected themes are paramount for understanding the approach used in this dissertation: *Phenomenology*, *everyday life* and the phenomenon itself – *screen time*. The reader can understand this section as an introduction to the more commonly and broadly used frameworks (a terminology of sorts). As these themes are discussed in greater length later in this dissertation, this section is instead devoted to their interconnectedness. It is initially important to note that when using the term 'screen time' in this dissertation, it is to be understood in the way it is used in everyday language. The term is criticized to neglect many important contexts when used in public discourse or state recommendations. However, it is widely used in parents' daily lives, and as such attains special meaning as an everyday phenomenon. This meaning is central to the explorations in the present study, as the parents' experiences, negotiations and practices are tied to *their own* understanding of the phenomenon.

The work within the present study should be seen as "enlightened by phenomenology" (Frykman & Gilje 2003) in its methodological approach. The overarching framework of the dissertation is informed by social phenomenology, mainly derived from Alfred Schütz (1970; Schütz & Luckmann 1973). Schütz's

phenomenological interest lies in the potential applications within the social sciences, rather than solely in the philosophical tradition. Schütz focuses on the observer of social agents, which consequentially makes his phenomenological approach more pragmatic and analytical (Pula 2020). As Schütz draws on Husserl's (1995) original philosophy, I will in this dissertation occasionally rely on Husserl to accentuate certain arguments when needed. Nonetheless, Schütz's social phenomenological framework provides social scientific perspectives that fit well with the application of additional social theories in the subsequent analysis.

A phenomenological perspective means being "interested in describing a person's experience in the way he or she experiences it" (Bevan 2014:136). This experience is exclusively subjective and context dependent. However, a phenomenological premise is that the world is mutually shared (Bengtsson 1998). The experiences of individuals within everyday life rely on a tangible, intersubjective world (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). Simply put, we all live in the same world, although our experiences differ. Individual experiences are perceptions of this intersubjective world, with its countless perspectives, interactions and forms. Everyday life is thus the context in which individuals navigate through the world, with a focus on the mundane, day-to-day experiences. This means understanding everyday life in a way that includes individual experiences and a close examination of the varied contexts in which these occur. Schütz focuses on social actors who engage in "mundane" acts "in concrete and practical lifeworlds" (Pula 2020:253), emphasizing the importance of understanding the day-to-day actions of individuals. This presents a pragmatic approach to exploring the everyday lives of, for example, parents and their approach to screen time. As individuals are embedded in everyday life, the stuff of everyday, the life-world is largely taken for granted (Schütz 1970; Moran 2024). Through the mundane, one does not question every aspect of every experience; instead, the life-world is experienced as lived in, a living that is something unquestionable and coherent. While the life-world is often wholly understandable to an individual, it is not without questions, uncertainties and queries that often require a reflexive attitude (Husserl 1995).[6]

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[6] Take, for example, the unquestioned things that surround us: a wall, a table, a chair or a computer screen. As we live our lives, these things do not constantly occupy our thoughts; they make up the coherence of the life-world. As such, we do not question that others, even if they experience it differently, will understand and not question the essence of, for example, a computer screen. It simply exists and is open to be experienced by us in the life-world.

In contemporary Western societies, everyday life is increasingly saturated by media, and media, in all its diverse forms of technologies and interactions, remains an inseparable part of daily life (Couldry & Hepp 2016). Screen time, conceptualized as the time spent on screen technologies, is thus one of the diverse phenomena that have emerged from this societal change. Screen time, however, holds special significance, since it is largely perceived as a "homogenization of media activities" (Forsler & Guyard 2020; see also Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2018). More often than not, the term screen time is specifically related to children and young people's screen practices (Lafton et al. 2023). In understanding the phenomenon, one essential aspect is investigating screen time as embedded in the everyday lives of individuals (here parents) in contemporary society. This contemporary (here Western and specifically Swedish) cultural context comes with its own ideals and norms, not least around how parenting *should* be done, and how parents negotiate these values (see Hays 1996; Furedi 2008; Sparrman et al. 2016). Adapting a phenomenological approach, screen time can be investigated as part of the parents' life-worlds and the contexts in which they encounter this phenomenon. The subjective experiences of the parents exist within the intersubjective world, which makes children and family life central to their negotiations, practices and meaning making processes. While children are not explicitly interviewed in this dissertation, they are central to the parents' negotiations. Linking these dimensions presents an understanding of how parents attribute meaning to the phenomenon as processes that occur in their family's everyday life.

Screen time, media and meaning

The previous section included a brief introduction to some of the fundamental themes and theoretical frameworks operating throughout this dissertation. This section provides an overview of the ways in which screen time is part of parenting, perceptions and values of media use and how media is an integral part of meaning-making processes in everyday life. In a vivid example from popular culture, the horror movie Come Play (Ambling Partners 2020) features an entity known only as "Larry," who becomes an increasingly hostile presence through the screen devices used by the main character, Oliver. As the plot unfolds, Larry intrudes more and more in Oliver's life, with the twist that Larry is only visible though cell phones, television sets or tablets. Sarah and Marty, the parents of seven-year-old

Oliver, are tasked with protecting him from this evil presence, which is not easily achieved. The movie is not the first to explore the idea of supernatural entities or phenomena that use media technology and screens as a means to hostilely pursuing their victims.[7] As a metaphor, Come Play is not subtle in its depictions of screen clad devices as dangerous (even lethal) pieces of technology, coloring the everyday with a certain tinge of malice. What it does do, however, is present a telling example of how parents' and children's everyday interactions with media technology are imagined as potentially harmful, where the effects, in many cases, are opaque, unknown and alien.

Popular culture "expresses and has a part in shaping a large majority of people's feelings, attitudes, thoughts, dreams and lifestyles" (Lindgren 2009:9).[8] Viewing these horror narratives from this perspective, it is not hard to make connections between public debates around screen time and the themes in these movies. Come Play becomes a fitting metaphor for this discourse; it suggests that beyond the terror that looms on and behind the screen, the parents in the story do everything in their power to protect their child from the evil screen entity, Larry. The parents are depicted as the last and only line of protection against the looming threat that lurks within screens. In investigating the negotiations and practices of parents around screen time, questions related to attitudes, emotions and negotiations come into play, providing insights into how the parents create meaning in their life-world (not unlike the metaphor presented in Come Play).

Screens and their uses are thus often seen as culprits, harming children's well-being and development. Social media, for example, has sparked a contemporary debate around young people and mental health (Ferguson et al. 2025), with some arguing that overly restrictive approaches could lead to social isolation (Zhang et al. 2024). Issues around gaming (see Enevold et al. 2018), social media, cyber bullying, sleep deprivation, obesity (Hashemi et al. 2025) and many other perceived harms and concerns have permeated the debate, especially in the mass media of the Nordic countries (Storup & Lieberoth 2023). This can be linked to increasingly prevalent discourses around digital detox and digital disconnection (Syvertsen 2020; Syvertsen & Enli 2020). Furthermore, this backlash has led some individuals to move away from screens, with many aiming to adopt a more

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[7] See, for example, Poltergeist from 1982, Ringu from 1998 or Countdown from 2019.

[8] Quote translated from Swedish by the author.

'analog' lifestyle (Albris et al. 2024). Public and institutional responses to what is perceived as excessive and harmful screen time often take the form of more and tougher restrictions. The reasoning behind Australia's social media ban for young people, for example, cited public discourse around screen use time as the reasoning behind it (BBC 2024). While outright bans are not the norm for addressing screen use among young people, many countries have established restrictive recommendations for younger children.

Recent technological developments have often triggered media panics (Drotner 1999), such as reactions to specific "dangerous" internet phenomena (Pattee 2022) or smart phone use (Madsen 2022). However, these are familiar discussions that frequently echo historical debates. For example, the debate around the harmful effects of television on children is a long-standing and familiar discourse (Piotrowski et al. 2015). Whether related to violence, sexuality or, to use a common Swedish expression, developing "square eyes," television has been blamed for multiple moral panics (Leick 2019). As Leick (2019) argues, this perspective often reveals similar tropes, with parents repeatedly framing the issue as screens and media colonizing children's "quality time" (see Christensen 2002), particularly their play.[9] As with the ideas behind digital backlashes, the proposed antidote to 'addictive' screens has often, if not always, centered around arguments that children should spend more time playing outdoors.

In many ways, the argument above posits that there are already multiple forms of screen time, all filled with different, often overlapping, meanings. Media is both personal and collective, and broader and more individualistic meaning-making are both parts of how we engage with media in everyday life (Markham 2017). Media is what we debate, negotiate and ultimately decide on in terms of uses, media does not hold essential or inherent value (Chambers 2016). It is within these media practices that meaning is made explicit (Couldry 2004). This holds true for practically all discussions around media – be it in the form of popular culture content, engagement on social platforms or how we understand media technologies. Screen time is, in the most descriptive sense of the word, conceptualized as time spent in front of screens (Lafton et al. 2023). This includes

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[9] The understanding of "quantity" or "quality" family time in regards to children places emphasis on how families spend more time socializing together (Christensen 2002). However, I adopt these terms to refer to the ways in which parents imagine what is 'good' (quality) and 'less good' (often quantity) time their children spend doing different activities.

connections to the materiality of the technology, temporal dimensions of usage and the actual practices around the specific media.

While the baseline understanding of screen time in this descriptive sense provides an overview of its complex relationships, the phenomenon is also a catalyst for meaning-making in a myriad of different public debates, personal opinions and preferred practices. Screen time as an everyday phenomenon includes the surface level of understanding media practices; however, it also encompasses ideals, values and norms that are not attainable at this level.[10] This is instead revealed through parents' negotiations around screen time, in which media technology is explored in terms of "the consequences it can have for our lives or relationships, our quality of experience" (Haddon 2011:316). Using screen time as a phenomenon experienced in the life-world of parents invites perspectives of screen time as part of daily life alongside all other activities that make up the mundane day-to-day. Scannell (2017) highlights the differences between the purely technological materiality and the meanings these technologies are embedded in, proclaiming:

> As a general rule, I'd like to put it like this: if we see the thing as technology, it is not an everyday thing. And if we see it as an everyday thing, if we don't see it as technology, we are seeing it as part of our own everyday world and life. (Scannell 2017:47)

The screen, in its unaltered and resting state, is a black, often flat object, varying widely in size, with a reflective surface that, under the right conditions, depicts only vaguely distorted shadows of the world. But when we speak of screen time, we are not referring to technologies in their resting state; instead, we refer to the multitude of potential uses and practices associated with these devices, whether passive or active. The screen is, to borrow McLuhan's (1967) classic terminology, the message, and it is often depicted as a message of harmful effects in need of management. While the object itself is central to this argument, the phenomenon is, essentially, twofold. Time, instead, connotes more ephemeral qualities, while the widespread understanding, as noted above, is that of restriction (a certain 'appropriate' amount of time is or should be spent using screens). In this

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[10] I use the term *phenomenon* instead of, for example, discursive construct (or simply discourse), as phenomenon relates to the first-hand subjective experiences of the interviewed parents. This allows a greater focus on the phenomenological perspective on parental negotiations, meaning-making processes and practices.

dissertation, the parents' experiences of screen time are simultaneously understood as concrete – at times even material – and more ephemeral in nature. As parts of daily life, media technologies have been theorized to be appropriated in individuals' domestic spaces, often through routinized processes of meaning-making (Bausinger 1984; Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley 1992; Haddon 2016).[11] These perspectives address the core of the more immaterial dimensions of screen time, such as norms, ideals and values.

The analysis of the empirical material is guided by what the parents articulate themselves – that is, what they express as important about screen time and their reflections on the norms and values surrounding the phenomenon. As such, this study revolves around the culture of parenting (see Lee, E. 2023) within the contemporary Swedish context. Couldry (2000) describes this specific approach of studying culture as "the distinctive approach to culture that results when we stop thinking about culture as particular valued texts and think about it as a broader process in which each person has an equal right to be heard, and each person's voice and reflections about culture are valuable" (2000:2). In this way, the term culture refers to the lived mundane daily lives of all people, while still acknowledging the importance of media artifacts such as music, video games, art or literature as expressions of culture and identity.

This is an understanding of culture as something "complex and contested" (Couldry 2000:2), at times neither easy to explain nor to understand. Williams (1988), in his etymologically focused account of the notion of culture, argues that the word is a "noun of process" (1983:87). This procedural perspective defines the transformative and dynamic dimensions of culture in social life. Williams further defines "the theory of culture as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life" (2001:67). Continuing this argument, Williams states that "[t]he analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships" (Ibid.). With this, Williams attempts to create an understanding of human culture from an anthropological or ethnographical vantage point, what he calls the documentary approach. Culture, in this sense, is not available in any pure form; an essentialist,

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[11] This perspective is attributed to domestication theory (see Silverstone, Hirsch & Morely 1992). While not part of the theoretical framework in this dissertation, this theory is interesting in terms of the perspective shift it contributed to around media technology and the domestic space in the early 1990s.

deterministic and static "culture" does not exist. Culture, and the *process of culture*, is reliant on social and environmental connections within a persons' life-world. Screen time, then, is ascribed kaleidoscopic meanings with cultural and social connotations, which form a large part of the analysis in this dissertation.

The perspectives and demarcations presented so far have implications on the study itself. I did not initially set out to investigate social stratification in relation to parenthood, families and screen time. While these perspectives certainly hold great value, the work within this study is based on subjective experience and has been conducted accordingly. This subjective focus reveals descriptive details that may not have been available if I had focused on issues related to social stratification, such as social class or gender. The individual experiences, as revealed in the participants' own reflections, are here the baseline for the analysis. However, in exploring the experiences of parents, social class – conceived of here as ideals and norms (see Hays 1996; Furedi 2008; Lareau 2011) – emerged as a prevalent theme. This further contextualizes experiences of parenting as uniquely contemporary and culturally situated. Nonetheless, issues of gender and ethnicity did not feature prominently in the parents' statements. As such, these dimensions of social life have only been included when they have been expressed by the parents themselves. Further, in studying parents and their experiences and ideas around family life and screen time, children are essential to this understanding – parenting practices only exist in relation to children. While not explicitly included here (as directly accessed empirical data), the parents' practices, ideals and negotiations revolve around their children, often focusing on well-being and development. The parents acknowledge and discuss their children's agency in terms of screen time, and this is part of the analysis. This dissertation should thus be seen as a contribution to the body of work on parenting and, more broadly, to research on families, media use and related ideals and norms in contemporary Swedish culture.

Outline of the dissertation

The introductory chapter has thus far provided an overview of the subject of study, as well as some of the contexts in which this study is situated. The introduction is designed to provide a brief overview of the central themes, aims and objectives of the dissertation, as well as how screen time can be understood in meaning-making processes of daily life. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research field, background and relevant positioning of the study. The first section of the chapter

is dedicated to screen time and research on the phenomena. The chapter also includes a presentation and definitions of the concepts of family, parenting and parenthood as understood in different contexts and from relevant perspectives. Lastly, the chapter deals with perspectives on, and the evolution of, the concept of everyday life, largely from a media and communications perspective.

Chapter 3 expands on the theoretical framework applied in the dissertation's analytical sections. Here, the main focal points are phenomenology as a theoretical application, practice-based approaches, reflexivity, morality and contemporary parenting as ideals and norms. The chapter also presents the methodological and ontological foundations of the study, as well as the methods, sampling approach, data analysis and a discussion on the limitations of the study. The chapter is comprised of two overarching sections: one focusing on theoretical frameworks and one on method and methodology. Moving into the empirically focused chapters, four main themes are explored: screen time as an everyday phenomenon, parental practices around screen time, the moral dimensions of screen time and screen time as horizons of the life-world. Each one of these respectively form a central theme within this dissertation.

As a further aggregation, the dissertation should be read as having two larger parts in terms of the thematic empirical content. The first two analytical chapters (4 and 5) deal with the question of screen time as part of parents' everyday life, with a special focus on management practices which the parents rely upon. In many ways, this section is dedicated to exploring the relationship between the parents' everyday negotiations and practices concerning screen time. Chapters 6 and 7, as the second major part of the thesis, mainly focus on the parents' experiences of screen time as moral issues and horizons. As these chapters largely explore the moral dimensions of screen time, the fundamental argument is around how (moral) negotiations are formed and play out in the parents' interactions with their children and other parents, as well as the parents' experiences of screen time recommendations and public discourses. A further description of the outline of these chapters is provided below.

Chapter 4 is the first empirically based chapter in the dissertation. This chapter explores the participants' attitudes and negotiations around screen time as part of their everyday lives. The analysis focuses on how screen time is perceived and made meaningful in the parents' life-worlds. This analysis works as a foundational discussion around the experience of everyday life and screen time, everyday

practices, morality and how these dimensions are expressed by the parents. Further, special attention is given to how these dimensions relate to contemporary ideals and norms around parenting and parenthood.

Chapter 5 focuses on the specific practices the parents describe in the interviews. This chapter is grounded on the notion that practices are built upon certain competencies and meanings (Shove et al. 2012) and examines how these relate to parenting and screen time. Competencies influence how screen time is perceived, as they constitute resources parents rely on to manage the phenomenon in their life-worlds. These competencies are not static; rather, they are also part of the negotiations around screen time, based largely on notions of reflexivity (Giddens 1984) as an integral part of these negotiations. Central to this discussion is how parenting is actually done (Morgan 1996a; 2011), which encompasses parents' own notions around what contemporary parenting is and should be.

In the first chapter in the second part of the dissertation (Chapter 6), the moral dimensions of screen time are explored in more detail. This chapter begins by exploring the moral aspects of screen time as reflected in how parents reflect on and understand screen time in relation to 'good parenthood'. This is a broader discussion on how good and bad parenting are constituted through ideals, meaning making processes and practices. The second part of this chapter deals with how the parents "display" (Finch 2007) their parenthood and parenting practices, particularly in relation to other parents. This is understood as the way in which the parents construct the moral dimensions of parenthood as outward-facing images that contribute to the creation of family-like constructions.

Chapter 7 explores how the parents imagine the horizons (Schütz 1970) of screen time, including recommendations, public debates, and individual and collective opinions. The analysis deals with how the parents perceive the overarching narrative around screen time and how they ascribe meaning, negotiate or resist these horizons. The central argument in this chapter is that while the parents are often able to articulate their reflections on these issues, they often understand the contexts as diffuse, uncertain or unknown. This opaqueness is reflected in how the parents relate these horizons to screen time in their daily lives, creating grey areas of negotiations where clarity is demanded but seldom available.

The final chapter (Chapter 8) provides further discussions and conclusions. The first section of the chapter presents a reflective summary and conclusion based on

the analysis of the empirical material. This is followed by a presentation of the theoretical outcomes of the analysis. The chapter concludes with a more general discussion on the implications of the dissertation, a contextualization and potential directions for future research.

2. Literature review

This chapter is intended to present an overview and discussion of the relevant literature that provides important backgrounds, perspectives and related themes relevant to this dissertation. While some of the perspectives and contexts presented in the chapter contribute to understandings of central theories in the dissertation, theoretical frameworks and their operationalization are further presented in Chapter 3. The first part of the present chapter presents an account of screen time as a phenomenon in the digital age. This provides an understanding of how screen time is perceived, discussed and researched – given its central role in the relevant contexts (and the many ways it constitutes these contexts) – in which parenting is explored in this dissertation. Following this section, an overview of the extensive literature on the concept of family, parenting and parenthood is presented. Family should be understood here as one of the intersubjective contexts in which parents operate, as a site of interactions (and negotiations) within which parenting takes place. This means outlining the relevant issues in the literature on parenting and family to broaden the understanding of the subject within the framework of this dissertation. Moreover, while this study only includes parents from Sweden, it also includes a contextualization of the developments around parenthood and parenting in Sweden. This will rely on an overview, and occasional deep dive, into core subjects such as family, parenting, morality and everyday life perspectives. The last section is dedicated to media use, morality and everyday life, which all constitute central themes in the dissertation.

The screen time phenomenon

On average, Swedish children between 9-14 use media 328 minutes a day, while the number is 512 minutes for teenagers and young adults between the ages of 15-24 as reported by Mediebarometern in 2023 (Ohlsson 2023). While this includes media such as printed press, most of this time is spent on YouTube, streaming services or music apps. In Swedish households, access to media

technologies such as television or smart phones is "near total", while laptops and tablets are only slightly less available (Ohlsson 2023). Sweden can without question be seen as technologically well-equipped in the digital age. Children are raised in families where media has a constant presence, encompassing a myriad of uses, practices and content (Sandberg et al. 2024a). The development and prevalence of media technologies within the household has led to increasing concerns "about the impact of digital screens on children's health, particularly in the Nordic countries" (Sandberg et al. 2024a:3).

In the last few decades, screen time has become both a discursive and conceptual construct, placing it at the center of debates and discussions, particularly among parents. Historically, the term "screen time" has had several different meanings, such as the way in which a film's length was denoted. Often credited as the first to use the term screen time in its contemporary meaning, Engelhardt (1991) used the term in his essay on children's television viewing and video game practices. When arguing for the invasive nature of children's television, Engelhardt proclaims with regard to the incessant features of screens: "What you see--what our children see—is screens within screens enclosed by screens" (Engelhardt 1991:68). The essay's focus is partly around the time children spend watching screens each day, which he refers to as screen time. Television has often been at the forefront of these debates, historically believed to have a negative impact on the social aspects of individuals' everyday lives (Hooghe & Oser 2015). However, the negative aspects of television have mostly revolved around content (Piotrowski et al. 2015), which makes the contemporary debates around screen time somewhat unique. For devices developed in recent decades, Screen Time (capitalized) is also a technological feature on several smart phones, informing users how active they have been on their devices. The original and contemporary meanings coincide to some extent, as the current use of the term screen time is usually meant to reference time spent on screens, overlooking actual activities and uses.

Consequently, screen time as a phenomenon in contemporary Western cultures often evokes concerns related to monitoring, techno-management, negative effects, restrictions and regulation. In contemporary Western societies, media technology is often imagined as a tool to enhance child development, but more often than not, it is also seen as a disruption to this process (Jeffrey 2021a). For many contemporary families, screen use "is often the object of negotiation or

conflict" (Lafton et al. 2023). Major global health actors, such as the World Health Organization, have introduced recommendations on screen time, aimed predominantly at parents of young children up to five years of age (WHO 2019). As another example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a maximum of two hours of screen time for adolescents across the board (Sanders et al. 2016). For younger children, the so-called '2 × 2' rule is often applied as a recommendation (Willett & Wheeler 2021). In Sweden, the Public Health Agency published recommendations in the mid-2020s similar to those of the WHO (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2024). Despite concerns, the increased use of media technologies has also been linked to improved academic performance and higher literacy rates, not restricted to the digital realm. Still, research on screen time among youth and children has largely focused on the negative health-related effects (Maricarmen 2020). A smaller number of studies have explored the more beneficial aspects of media technology use, for example, improved media literacy in pedagogical contexts (Halpern 2024; Golob et al. 2023). This is not without its challenges, however, as digital and media literacy are dependent on socio-economic resources and contexts (McGillivray & Mahon 2021).

The relationship between screen time and child development is an extensive and growing area of research (Monteiro et al. 2022). Psychological and medical studies have consistently linked young children's increased or unregulated screen time to negative effects on psychological well-being (Santos & Reeve 2020; Tezol et al. 2022). A vast body of research on screen time focuses on the effects on child development (see, e.g., Kracht at al. 2023; Yamamoto et al. 2023; Yang et al. 2024; Slobodin et al. 2024), as well as strategies for regulating screen time for health reasons (Ponti 2023; Choe et al. 2024). Further, screen time research has had a special focus on the relationship between screen use and physical activity (Iguacel et al. 2018; Forte et al. 2023). Nonetheless, Monteiro et al. (2022) note that these effects "are dependent on the age of the child, the extension of exposure, the content visualized, and the interaction between child and caregiver during the exposure" (2022:1). When reviewing the research on screen time use from the field of psychology, it is evident that many studies contain normative associations and assumptions. For example, some studies use formulations such as "appropriate screen time use" (Vrinda et al. 2021) or "excessive screen time use" (Tezol et al. 2022). The temporal dimension is often cited as the main culprit in these studies, overlooking what is actually done on the screen (Lafton et al. 2024).

What this illustrates is a strong normative assumption on what is considered acceptable screen time.[12] These kinds of values do not emanate from thin air. Mascheroni and Zaffaroni (2023) state that "public discourses around screen time are contradictory in nature, praising the educational opportunities of digital media for children's future while simultaneously warning against harmful effects" (2023:2). Through their reproduction in both the academic setting and everyday contexts, they are shaped, reshaped and given a disparate set of attached norms and ideals. These meanings are never static or contextless; rather, their "reproduceable" (van Manen 2014:42) character in language situates them more or less firmly within the everyday. What this means in practice is that when we discuss or use the term 'screen time,' our connotations are culturally situated and, in many ways, shared across a common understanding. Screen time is inextricably bound to moral questions pertaining to technology in a broader sense, as well as practical dilemmas situated within the everyday. The moral aspects studied in this dissertation contribute to the understanding of the term screen time from the perspective of everyday parenting practices.

Screen time, parenting and everyday life

Screen time is often presented as a catch-all concept for practices intended to regulate the consumption of media technology. However, it is rarely discussed on a conceptual basis in a way that explores the phenomenon itself. Some research has explored the discursive constructions of screen time. In a Danish context, Storup and Lieberoth (2023) investigated the mass media's construction of screen time considering the past decade's intensification of "new technological developments in our everyday lives" (Storup & Lieberoth 2023:202). As they note, screen time was largely used to represent issues of mental health, as well as discourses around "attention and time" (Ibid. 2023:214). In the US, Willett and Wheeler (2021) identify "negative scripts" around screen time discourses as influential in shaping notions of parental control over children's media use. While these discourses relate to broader understandings of screen time (recommendations, experts, etc.), they are also indicative of the prevalence of such a narrative in parents' daily lives. In everyday language, screen time is therefore often used to discuss the effects of media technology on children. However, the

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[12] I acknowledge that this differs depending on the cultural context, and that screen time is not a universal concept, nor its appropriate use.

term screen time often excludes what is linked to the perceived harms – namely, the actual content consumed on the technology in question (Forsler & Guard 2020), whether this is tablets, smart phones, television or computers. The actual practice of *using* media remains the object of interest and debate.

Furthermore, public discourses and institutional recommendations around screen time and excessive screen use have suggested that screen use elicits feelings of stress (Tang et al. 2021), guilt and stigmatization among parents (Hartshorn et al. 2021; Wolfers et al. 2023; Sandberg et al. 2024b). In fact, parents in many Western cultures often cite screen time as a source of anxiety (Murray & Watson 2024), where a discourse around parental guilt is commonplace in these contexts. In Western societies, public discourses on screen time and parenting often involve "similar tensions" (Zaman 2020), drawing on emotions or parental expectations to varying degrees. However, this presumption of "public anxiety" often relies on insufficient evidence and contradictory results (Manell et al. 2024). In everyday life, this anxiety can for example be expressed as the reliance on screen technology as a babysitter of sorts (Willett 2023). This creates a sense of parental pressure, as parents often feel guilty about using screens to free up time when cooking dinner, cleaning or conducting other mundane everyday tasks where no other options are available. Another perspective concerns the rules and regulations around screen time, which are often linked to parents' interpretations of governmental recommendations (D'Angelo & Moreno 2019; Sandberg et al. 2024a). These perspectives often focus on the temporal aspects of screen time, in which negative effects are related to the time spent on screens, not the actual activity (Tomczyk & Selmanagic 2023).

This leads to arguments that parental struggles to monitor screen time have consequences for parent-child communication, especially when screen use is not always an open and disclosed activity (Marciano et al. 2022). Parents and children do not always share a common view on how to manage screen time. Studies from Singapore show that, while parents may feel their management approach is open and democratic, children often view the same approach as "instructional and one-way" (Lwin 2021). A substantial part of the argument depicting screen time as problematic is that the phenomenon disrupts children's interest in other activities, often perceived as more important (Vize 2008; Hurwitz et al. 2020) such as schoolwork (Vize 2008), reading or playing outside. Nonetheless, screen time has also been argued to promote socialization, especially under exceptional

circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s (Fry 2021). These contexts and perspectives omit special cases, such as the impact on children with disabilities (Manganello 2021). While not directly referencing the screen time phenomenon, Chambers (2021) argues that the mediated home could actually facilitate family social interaction, as opposed to the commonly theorized outcome of increased individual activity.

One aspect of the perceived failure in parenting when it comes to children's screen use is the lack of insight into the specific activities performed (Jensen 2016; Marciano et al. 2022). Jensen (2016) notes that this debate remains a prevailing narrative in today's media landscape. Experts are called in, represented and pitted against those with opposing views in the mass media. What becomes "particularly striking in this regard is a seemingly similar view of childhood as a place where the wrongdoings of society can be set straight through professionally guided enculturation without raising any political or socio-cultural issues" (Jensen 2016:30). It should be noted that in excluding the context in which this "co-consuming" is taking place (i.e., everyday practices), the term screen time remains an abstraction that tells us little about the circumstances under which these practices are carried out. It would also be less appropriate to relate screen time solely to "technological control," which would entail significantly different connotations. Furthermore, Pontes (2020) argues that what is actually happening on the screen – the content and digital activity – is often invisible in screen time recommendations, creating the notion that "all screen time activities are essentially the same." Pontes (2020) concludes that not including these dimensions creates shortcomings in applied methodologies.

More ethnographic and sociological studies have explored screen time and family life, including studies with a specific focus on screen time and parenting. In a Swedish study, Sandberg et al. (2024a; 2024b) examined screen use among young children (0-3 years of age) and conducted interviews with parents to gain their perspectives. Among several other important conclusions, the authors note that screen time as a concept does not account for the content that is actually consumed on the screen. Further, the authors argue that screen time recommendations are difficult for parents to translate into everyday practices. In an interview study in the US, Willett (2023) comes to similar conclusions, noting that parents' practices and decisions around screen time often contradict the discourses of recommendations and formal regulations. Willett (2023) further

concludes that managing screen media in the domestic space denotes "efforts to maintain ontological security" (2023:340). Sandberg et al. and Willett both call for policy makers and experts to place greater importance on parent's expertise, rather than solely relying on institutional discourses. In a UK study, Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) also raise the importance of adopting policies that are based on practical experience, noting that parenting styles have an impact on the way media use is managed within the family. In a study conducted in Spain, Monteiro et al. (2022) included both teachers of pre-school children and parents. The respondents shared concerns about children's development on many levels, largely reproducing discourses in public debates and policy recommendations. In interviews with Australian parents, Jeffrey (2021a) finds that socio-technological perspectives on child development and practices aimed at managing media technologies in everyday life "intensify parental anxieties" (2021a:1057).

Teichert (2020) turns to her own experiences as a new mother when she investigates the digital literacy of her child (through screen time) from a phenomenological perspective. As a starting point, she refers to government guidelines on young children and screen time, in her case the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The study focuses on the tensions between official recommendations and the "lived experience," which are central to the phenomenological undertaking. Hammons et al. (2021) apply a phenomenological framework in exploring parents' experiences with screen time during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study, conducted in a pediatric setting, uses focus groups to identify themes around screen time issues in parents' lives. The results indicate that parents mostly see screen time negatively, describing it as addictive. They also reported an overall increase in screen time during the pandemic. The phenomenological perspective is also present in Phillips (2024) dissertation on parents' motivational influence over their children's screen time, and their experiences of it. Phillips concludes that parents' motivations play a significant role in their children's "over-usage" of screens in the home. While these studies are partially aligned with the framework of the present study, they focus on specific notions and fields that distinguish them from the work done here.

As negative perceptions of screen and media use take hold, different kinds of resistance toward these technologies emerge (e.g., digital detox or digital disconnection). These terms refer to periods of time and spaces where screen use is restricted, often self-imposed (Syvertsen 2020). Sometimes described as a

movement, digital detox is largely seen as an individual practice, but it also takes the form of organized screen-free retreats and other initiatives (Syvertsen 2023). In this way, digital detox – also referred to as digital disconnection – has also become a commercialized phenomenon. With artifacts such as self-help books prevalent in this trend, it is argued that the solution to screen overload in contemporary society is to build a more "authentic" social life, away from the screen (Syvertsen & Enli 2020). In Sweden, for example, the 2019 "Christmas Gift of the Year" was a mobile phone box, where one's phone would be placed to facilitate digital disconnection (Fast et al. 2021). These practices are seen as responses to imaginaries around the digitized society, which "permeate our everyday lives" (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne 2021). The norms around digital disconnection signal perceived feelings of not being in control of one's media use, which are shaped by social interactions (Fast et al. 2021). Digital detox – particularly in relation to screen time – is valued as morally admirable, placing it in opposition to these practices, while still adhering to the same norms. These ideals manifest in several initiatives, such as Smartphone Free Childhood, which focus on decreasing digital media use among children (Smartphone Free Childhood 2025).

In conclusion, screen time is often understood as a source of various forms of harm, anxiety and worry. Recommendations are criticized for failing to account for the contexts and lived experiences of parents – the very target group tasked with regulating their children's screen time. At the same time, discourses around screen time consistently emphasize notions of danger, harm and responsibility. Further, screen time and screen use (or media use) are often used synonymously (see, e.g., Folkhälsomyndigheten 2024; Sandberg et al. 2024b), and connote very similar (or often the same) forms of practices. The notion of time in screen time (i.e., counting minutes or hours) can also potentially conceal the diversity of screen practices; that is, what is actually done on the screen. In this dissertation, screen time should be understood as a phenomenon that encapsulates these specific values, ideal, norms and practices. On the other hand, screen use or media use is used as a general term to describe a much broader set of practices. For instance, playing digital games on a smart phone constitutes screen time, while paying with a digital debit card on the same device is more general media use. Nonetheless, the ways in which parents draw these boundaries constitute a central theme in the dissertation. This dissertation contributes to the literature in several important ways. Empirically, the fact that the ages of the children in the families

vary contributes additional knowledge to research within the Swedish context, complementing Sandberg et al.'s (2021; 2024a; 2024b) studies on parents of children aged 0-3 years. Further, through a phenomenological focus, this study explores facets of how everyday practices, ideals and interactions with others intertwine to form the parents' subjective experiences. Inevitably, this perspective also reveals norms around contemporary parenting and parenthood in relation to screen time. Another contribution is that the study includes contemporary parenting ideals, such as intensive parenting (Hays 1996) and paranoid parenting (Furedi 2008), to explore various dimensions of parenthood and screen time.

Family as concept and context

Historically, the general understanding of society in social research has focused on the public spheres of daily and social life, largely disregarding "the family-based social interactions of domestic spaces, seen as the province of psychologists and psychiatrists" (McCarthy 2022:304). Since the late 1980s, the concepts of parenthood and parenting have been subject to many of the same criticisms and discussions around normativity and meaning that have long been applied to the concept of family (see, e.g., Morgan 1975; 1996a; 2011). In exploring parenthood and parenting, one cannot divorce these concepts from that of the family. A recurring discussion within the social sciences on concepts such as family is their diverse nature and the importance of recognizing this across seemingly disparate research fields. This diverse nature is accredited to "changes in the ways that individuals think, live, and build their families and intimate relationships, while some other aspects remain quite stable" (Castrén 2021:3), which is true to most European contexts. However, a family is more often than not conceptualized as a relatively stable form of community, where the effects of the relationships within the family shape individual's lives. For many people, family is a large part of the "relationality of everyday life," a context that includes both individual and intersubjective perspectives (Boddy 2023).

In social and cultural research, numerous attempts have been made to define the core meaning of the concept of family. In recent years, the concept of family has become central to a multitude of emerging and differing relationships, not purely through "consanguinity, alliance, genealogical proximity, co-residence and heteronormativity" (Gouveia & Castrén 2021:259). Williams (1988) argues that the etymology of family relates to definitions from the late 1300s, where it is

semantically derived from the state of being "familiar." Giddens and Sutton (2017) define family in its most basic form as a set of individuals who "share a mutual commitment to the group" (2014:120), which aligns with a goal-oriented perspective. In classic functionalist view of social systems, as in Talcott Parsons (Jenks 1993), the family holds a significant place in the "machinery" or organism of society (Rodman 1965), being a "system within a system" (Roman 2004:28)[13]. The role of family in this perspective to create and uphold values that benefit society through child-rearing, where family is perceived as a place of love and security. In the 1970s, these functionalist ideas were criticized by feminist scholars for concealing inequalities within the family, particularly those related to gender (Roman 2004). Functionalist ideas of the family rely on understandings of family as a fairly uncomplicated concept, but this view has been challenged on many levels, including by those in the field of gender studies (Litton Fox & McBride Murry 2000).

Beck-Gernsheim (2002) notes that in contemporary societies, family has become a concept where "[t]he boundaries are becoming unclear, the definitions uncertain" (2002:2). The concept is not simply a uniform label, and "in complex late-modern society, there may well be contradictions and negotiations between different conceptions of family" (Morgan 2011). Families consist of individuals and collectives, often significantly heterogeneous in nature, encompassing emotions, everyday routines, arguments and differing life-worlds. One family is never synonymous with another, and a growing body of research takes many forms of families into account, including "cohabiting couples, single-parent families, post-divorce and 'blended' families, same-sex unions, 'friends as family', 'living apart but together' (LATS) and 'families of choice'" (Chambers 2012a:1). As Morgan (2011) notes, these could be considered contemporary re-conceptualizations of the concept, bringing with them ideals and norms around how family is actually perceived and understood.

It is not only the above living arrangements that can be considered here – notions of extended family or stepfamilies are variations of what can be imagined and understood as family (Starbuck & Saucier Lundy 2015). The concept of family does not necessarily need to be confined to a particular space, such as in living in the same household; it can include, for example, intergenerational constellations

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[13] Author's translation from Swedish.

of grandparents and grandchildren (Eldén et al. 2024). The generational perspective on what Anving et al. (2025) call "proxy parenting" also extends to media technology. Martinez (2022) put this generational perspective into focus when exploring the mediation practices of grandparents and great grandparents in relation to children's digital media use. Voida and Greenberg (2012) investigate "computer-mediated intergenerational interactions" and show how digital games can facilitate generational interactions between family members.

Many of the non-traditional family constellations are often mythologized as being starkly different from normative families, which is often not the case (Golombok 2015). These "new families," as Golombok (2015) refers to them, have become visible as products of, for example, the "growth of the women's liberation and gay rights movements in the 1970s" (2015:3). Not only are the structural aspects of the family under constant negotiation, but Morgan also (1996a; 2011) argues for a more practice-based perspective on families. What he suggests is that families are constructed, or "done," through practices related to their specific context, while simultaneously shaping those contexts. In this sense, families are formed in the constant doing of family that is part of everyday life. The notion of "doing parenthood" is, for example, utilized in Andersson and Carlström's (2019) study on mass media representations of "more-than-one parent families" (Andersson & Carlström 2019:82). Through a content analysis, they explore families with more than two parents (e.g. polyamorous constellations), and how these are presented in Swedish mass media. The repertoires found in this analysis, put simply, describe the ways in which these types of families were depicted as legitimate families with legitimate parents.

While this perspective provides an initial understanding of family practices and the meaning-making that occurs, the family as context can be conceptualized as:

> [T]he site of the construction of normative behaviors and values, with individuals (parents and caregivers) responsible for looking after their family's needs, managing their place in society and accepting the responsibilities as constructed by the state. (Willett & Wheeler 2021:725)

While these perspectives add to an understanding beyond normative assumptions, the dominant view of the family continues to be that of a nuclear family – a father, a mother and children living together in a shared domestic space. Therborn (2014) argues that this was part of the industrialization process in Europe, where

the notion of family underwent a kind of "standardization," which often meant an understanding of the family as a nuclear constellation. In this way, regardless of family constellation, families are viewed as a vital part of the socialization processes of children. Parents, however they are defined, are the designated protectors, with (most often) the goal of creating a risk-free, ideal everyday. It is also worth noting that even though ideals and norms are partly constituted by public discourses on the subject of good parenting, they are not generalizable at the micro level. Therefore, the heterogeneous constellation of families has an impact on these ideals and norms, which inevitably differ between families both in nuances and on a broader scale. Families are the contexts in which parental practices occur and where ideals and norms manifest. It is in the family's everyday interactions and practices that parenthood and its related ideas are laid bare. When families are presented as providing functions such as "reproduction, socialization of children and economic cooperation" (Starbuck & Saucier Lundy 2015:8), it is apparent that family as a concept is sometimes understood as interchangeable with parenthood.

The family context is the site of exploration in this dissertation, why an understanding on the different view remain crucial. However, it is in the way the parents themselves experience this family life, and how parenting is 'done' within it, that is central here. The contribution to this field is additional knowledge of screen time as part of the contexts of everyday family life, as well as how screen time is part of "doing family" (see Morgan 2011). This expands on both media practices in daily life and how family life is imagined (as norms and values) and experienced (as subjects) by the parents.

Perspectives on contemporary parenthood

When exploring and creating an understanding of parents and parenthood in relation to screen time in the digital age, several central questions arise: Who is considered a parent? What are a parent's responsibilities? What practices are considered parenting? And in what ways are values around parenting grounded in contemporary contexts? The ideals and norms surrounding parenthood and parenting are in no way static – neither historically nor culturally. In arguing for retaining a special focus on the culture of parenting, Lee, E. (2023) posits how the "sociocultural context in which parents raise their children has changed in recent decades" (2023:7). These changes, which are both structural and

individual, have a significant impact on how parenting and parenthood is understood in the context in which it is studied. This is brought forward in several ways; for example, in what "child experts" highlight as important for parenting, as well as in individual practices in the domestic space. Furedi (2008) argues that through policies, developments and a reliance on experts in parenting and child-rearing, contemporary (Western) societies create a culture of worry and undermine parents' confidence in their own abilities. This can partly be explained by developments during the last century, where "children and childhood are socially constructed as 'at risk'" (Pain 2006). This means children are believed to be vulnerable and innocent, placing even greater emphasis on parental protection and surveillance. However, this perspective is at times criticized for placing too much emphasis on a view of society as dominated by suppressive forces that parents need to constantly resist (Van Den Berge 2013).

Societal changes, with a primary focus on Western societies, are intertwined with the ideals of parenthood (Livingstone & Blum-Ross 2020), meaning that structure and agency should not be considered separate processes, but as parallel in many ways. Child-rearing, or upbringing, becomes "inseparable from language, work and culture" (Ramaekers & Hodgson 2020). Ramaeker and Hodgson (2020) discuss how criticism has been directed at the construction of contemporary parenting, parenthood and childhood, which have been impacted by "conditions of digitisation" (2020:108). This critical attention is, among other issues, aimed at how parenting is construed as merely having a functionalist role in attaining parenting goals, which are set externally (e.g., in policy goals), how parents are subject to expert advice determined by a "particular scientific basis," and how parents are viewed as in need education to be able to parent correctly (Ramaekers & Hodgson 2020). The ways in which parents in this dissertation reproduce ideals and norms through screen time in their daily lives is an empirical undertaking of this perspective.

Conservative ideals that emerged in many Western societies during the 1970s and 1980s had an impact on ideals of parenting and how parenting was perceived (Hendrick 2016). Discussing Britain, Hendrick (2016) outlines out how these ideals aided in constructing a view of parenting as a means of control, building on behavioral perspectives. While these ideals were later criticized from many sides for being overly focused on containment and having a narrow view of parenting practices, these norms were reinforced through popular programs like Supernanny

or in governmental advice to parents and caregivers. Hendrick (2016) calls this the "remoralization" of child-rearing and parenting in Britain (2016:227). This remoralization can be seen as a feature of contemporary Western societies, as the responsibility for the health and well-being of children (see Lupton 2013) is often placed on the parents. Obesity (WHO 2019) or feeding practices (Faircloth 2010; Lee, E. 2023) are contemporary examples of issues that have become increasingly debated and identified as sources of "risk anxiety" (Pain 2006) in relation to the well-being of children. This creates ideals around how 'good' parenthood is constructed, which includes issues concerning screen time (see Sandberg et al. 2024a).

Hays (1996) argues that one feature of contemporary (American) family life is intensive mothering, which is defined as "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive" (1996:8). Hays conception is considered to capture many of the elements upon which the contemporary ideals of parenthood and parenting are built (Lee, T.T. 2023). Intensive mothering is explained as an ideology that is historically constructed, rather than being based on the "natural propensities of mothers or the absolute needs of children" (1996:x). Hays describes the contradiction of modern motherhood, where mothers are pressured to devote vast amounts of time and energy to child-rearing while also working outside the home. One of the points that Hays (1996) makes is that parenting and child-rearing are cultural patterns, highly dependent on the society and social context in which they occur. Different societies and cultures depend on children in different and specific ways, which leads to varying parenting ideals and practices. This means that the cultural context in which families, parents and children are understood is crucial to understanding how ideals and norms are formed within that context (Hays 1996:20).[14]

Nelson (2010) describes this intensification of parenting in contemporary culture in terms of control, a close parent-child relationship, intimacy and a hovering style of child-rearing. She partially attributes this intensification to technological advancements in surveillance and enhanced modes of communication, but more importantly to an emerging form of intimacy, constructed by modern psychological developments, social recommendations and changes in relational

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[14] For example, in certain cultures, children are sometimes seen as economic resources, which does not align with the Western perspective on children.

contexts between parent and child. Technological practices were central to Nelson's understanding of how this notion of "closeness" comes into being. This specific form of intimacy is dualistic in nature, encompassing the practices and ideals of both child and parent, where closeness constitutes a contemporary ideal of the parent-child relationship (Nelson 2010:11).

The ideals and norms discussed in this dissertation are closely connected to how parents experience and negotiate screen time. This should be seen as a contribution to existing knowledge of social class and contemporary parenting, primarily through the exploration of the media use within the distinct context of the domestic space. This also contributes to further knowledge about modern-day parenting in the media-saturated Swedish culture, with a special focus on the mundane day-to-day of parents.

Developments in parenthood in the Swedish context

This study is conducted within a Swedish context, relying on the experiences of Swedish parents as the empirical foundation. As with all situated research, this context is where parenthood and parenting are digested through a historical and institutional perspective. Historically, Sweden has followed a Western, specifically European, trajectory of urbanization. As people moved to growing, modern cities, family life was inevitably transformed. Frykman and Löfgren (2022) note that the political reforms from the late 1800s to the early 1960s ultimately became established in Swedish society through the everyday practices that cemented them (2022:15). Frykman and Löfgren emphasize the importance of understanding the everyday in conjunction with institutional understandings and political decision-making. Since the early 1900s, the nuclear family has been the standard structure for Swedish families, largely due to the way in which the home has developed and ultimately been used by Swedish families. This includes the division of labor and care in the domestic space, which in modern day Sweden is often based on "egalitarian ideals", meaning these tasks should be divided equally between both parents (Alsarve & Glatz 2025). Further, the ideals that are derived from this development are often related to those of the middle-class (Gottzén 2009), making the norms more visible in these families.

However, these developments have not occurred in a vacuum; they have been shaped by institutional policies and the state, even though Frykman and Löfgren's

(2022) perspective firmly adopts the vantage point of daily life. State initiatives entered the domestic space and effectively helped set "the standard for parenthood and childhood" (Gottzén 2009). A large part can be attributed to the way in which health-related and educational aspects of parenthood emerged during the early to mid-1900s, through the 1970s and beyond (Eklund & Lundqvist 2021). This included a variety of state interventions, such as more comprehensive "health check-ups for small children and pregnant women" (Eklund & Lundqvist 2021:33). In 1979, a law was put in effect that outlawed all forms of corporal punishment against children, which affected parents, caregivers and other people involved in children's lives (Durrant & Olsen 1997). Children were in effect granted a kind of relational independence, becoming untethered from their parents' in terms of physical control. In the 1990s, perspectives started to shift, with families increasingly viewed as autonomous units with a higher degree of self-regulation. Giddens (1998) refers to this shift as a move towards a democratic view of the family, which is part of what he understands as the individualization of the family. This perspective, though still prevalent in certain discourses, has been criticized for understating, even dismissing, the importance of social class and its impact on family life.

Historically then, policies have primarily been designed based on the ideal of the nuclear family. Nonetheless, the notion of equality in relationships between (heteronormative) parents has held a central place in policy developments in Sweden (Bergnehr & Henriksson 2023). Many of the family policies that were introduced in Sweden during the 1970s focused on gender equality. The "desired goals" of these policies were to be achieved through changes in, for example, parental leave, adapted working hours for parents of young children and the right "to return to the same job after the [parental] leave" (Ahlberg et al. 2008:8). The parental leave system became gender-neutral, with leave ideally divided equally between both parents. The gendered contract, which establishes and separates parents as primarily responsible for either income or childcare, was to be eradicated through these policies. Families in Sweden are often understood in relation to these discourses, where parents or caregivers are perceived as having shared responsibility in terms of work, child-rearing and finances (Alenius Wallin 2024). During this period, reports also called for the promotion of greater engagement among fathers, which was seen as a missing piece in many families (Ahlberg et al. 2008). In this context, the nuclear family has often been discursively constructed as the most stable way to ensure children's proper and

safe development. Though child-rearing was still seen as a "public responsibility" in the early to mid-1900s (Gottzén 2009), the family (especially the efforts of mothers), became increasingly understood as the primary site of children's development. When alternative forms of parenthood and caregivers are depicted, for example, in mass media, "love and intimacy and responsible and successful parenting" are often central (Andersson & Carlström 2019:81), echoing the ideal of the nuclear, often middle-class, family.

While these policies ultimately contributed to unequal family relationships (especially for mothers), they discursively add to the construction of ideals on what is considered good parenting in Sweden (Eklund & Lundqvist 2021). Moreover, several of the perspectives and initiatives mentioned, point to the centrality of the child in family policy, a development which Hays (1996) states as crucial in understanding contemporary western parenting cultures. Partly, this also emanates from the fact that parenting, in the Swedish context, is based on the rights of the child perspective, following the UN Convention from 1989 (Rooth et al. 2017). The focus on children's safety and protected childhoods is crucial for how ideas of parenting have been shaped in Sweden since the 1960s. This focus has led to "rhetorical consensus among politicians, practitioners and researchers in Europe," in which not only the protection of children's rights is considered paramount, but also their "promotion and participation" (Rooth et al. 2017:511). In these formulations, children's agency and voice are considered fundamental in the development of their own rights. Nonetheless, it can be argued that these perspectives on children potentially lead to an 'othering' of children, where they are perceived as essentially different from adults (Sparrman et al. 2012).

In addition to national and European policies, other recent developments have impacted the understanding of parenthood in Sweden today. In an increasingly digitized society, parents have opportunities to seek information on parenting in a multitude of ways, often including a multitude of digital platforms. This includes looking for parenting advice in online forums and here expressing emotions around parenting issues (Bodin 2023). In recent decades, this has been an increasing development, meaning parents are exposed to a myriad of ideas, advice and values through both online and offline sources (Plantin & Daneback 2009). Historically, experts, especially in psychology and psychiatry, have had a strong presence in advice columns, magazines, television and books (Skagius 2020). But today, parents can obtain information not only from experts but also from other parents and

various digital resources. Parenting advice and recommendations are therefore even more prevalent in parents' everyday in contemporary Sweden.

While these are largely historical perspectives, they contextualize how modern-day parenting culture in Sweden has been shaped into what it is today. As the present study is situated within this cultural context, it explores contemporary parenting and how it is expressed by the participating parents. Thus, the parents express values that have a specific cultural and historical heritage, reflecting what may be considered 'right' and 'wrong' parenting practices. Following Dermott (2016), the study explores "how aspects of the normative emerge or are evident through everyday activities" (2016:139). Through the phenomenon of screen time, this study contributes to knowledge around the forms and expressions of 'good' parenting in contemporary parenting culture in Sweden.

Parents, media effects and media panics

While parenthood and parenting involve an almost immeasurable array of practices and contexts, which inevitably change over time, the focus of this dissertation is the relationship with media technology. Parents are held responsible for the safety and well-being of their children, often leading to strong positions in terms of morals and values. Children's use of media has become an "inescapable fact" (Buckingham 2007:43). Media technology in the digital society is often at the forefront of these moral discussions and related research (Pigeron 2012; Yasaroglu & Boylu 2020). While the dangers of media technology are among the main issues addressed in these debates, children are often conceptualized as especially susceptible to risks, especially health-related risks (Lupton 2013), under which many perspectives on media technology fall (Jordan 2004; Cingel & Krcmar 2013). The themes and approaches that surround these risks are wide ranging, from online sexual risks (Kendra 2024), alcohol exposure in media content (Jackson et al. 2021), targeted advertisements in online mobile games (Martinez 2019) and the curation of content algorithms in social media (Taylor & Brisini 2024). Children's susceptibility to risks, in turn, lays the foundation for norms and values of parenting and can result in practices such as surveillance of children's media devices (Dungey 2024). At the beginning of the century, the internet was (and often still is) conceived of as a site of danger, resulting in an abundance of digital "horror stories" (Potter & Potter 2001).

The way in which these moral debates unfold is neither alien nor exclusively contemporary. Concerns around media use tend to escalate practically every time a new medium enters the home, be it television (Livingstone 2009) or "dangerous" content in video and digital games (Leick 2019). Strong opinions about how children and young people should spend their free time have been prevalent from the 1960s through the present day, including concerns over television in the 1960s and 1970s and video games in the 1980s and 1990s (Leick 2019). Ideas around media effects have been prevalent in studies in these areas (e.g., television violence) as a way to understand how mass media influences and has certain moral effects (Gerbner & Gross 1976). The media effects perspective has seen continued relevance, with video games being a central focal point of many of these studies (see, e.g., Kirsch 1997; Chong et al. 2010; Gradi et al. 2024).

These effects, as with many perceived and researched media effects, cannot simply be related to harm. There are often grey areas within this research, making it difficult to generate clear evidence of media effects (Kowert & Quandt 2021). Critics who highlight these perceived dangers, especially the dangers of digital games and social media use, are often accused of inciting "moral panics," a concept introduced by Cohen (2011 [1972]). By moral panics, Cohen refers to events, often of a moral character (e.g., demonstrations), that receive exaggerated coverage in media.[15] Moral panics are tied to moral phenomena, as they seem out of control and unacceptable by society's standards and norms (Crichter 2003). Moral panics relate to media in the way that a subject is represented (and then exaggerated), as well as how different forms of media are seen as morally deplorable (e.g., graphic horror games" (see Hughes et al. 2013). Drotner (1999) adapts this term to talk specifically about media panics, which she calls "emotionally charged reactions on the appearance of new media" (Drotner 1999:593). Drotner then places media and media technology as central to the moral panic, while Cohen's concept is broader in scope.

The advent of new media technologies has not only been met with negative connotations, but also with the realization that these technologies offer opportunities for societal, institutional and individual advancements (Drotner 1999). Through current debates around screen time, the use of media technology in pre-schools and digital games as educational tools (e.g. *Minecraft*), the

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[15] Cohen's example referred to newspapers, but in contemporary society, this can include mass media, social media and a host of different platforms.

complexities of people's feelings towards these technologies become visible. The media panics debate, and research conducted with both a moral and media panics framework, has been criticized for being too reliant on a claim to rationality (Buckingham & Jensen 2012). However, what the concept of media panics does do as a methodological and theoretical approach, is challenge the "dominance of a simplistic media effects approach" (Buckingham & Jensen 2012:415). The concept of media panics thus presents another discourse on the moral dimensions of parenthood, highlighting phenomena that depict certain risks (e.g., violence and sex in video games) which has an impact on parents' views of media technology and content.

Parental practices themselves can also be argued to have attributes or even constitute moral panics, such as "sharenting" (Ugwudike et al. 2024), which refers to parents presenting (and showing off) their family life on social media platforms, often without the consent of their children (Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2017). In some cases, this is also connected to digital mothering as affective "communicative activities," showing how sharenting forms part of the ideals of motherhood and parenthood (Lazard et al. 2019:7). While sharenting is often well-meaning and stems from feelings of pride, the children's own perspectives are often absent (Tosuntaş & Griffiths 2024). In Western societies such as Sweden, many of these debates play out on a daily basis. Although the media effects approach is highly contested within media and communication studies, moral discussions around the perceived harm of media content continue to flourish.

Media and parenting ideals

Morality is often at the forefront when discussing parental practices and media (and their perceived effects). These practices are often subject to valuing, though not always explicitly. As Widding (2015) notes, there is an abundance of parenting expertise based on the preconceived notion that people need guidance in their roles as parents. This includes TV programs, parenting magazines and parenting courses. Widding's study, which included parents who had completed a Swedish parenting course, showed that respondents conceptualized 'good' parenting as having "a responsible character, who strives for the best of the child and who is sincerely engaged in the child" (Widding 2015:53). This is in line with Gottzén's (2009) description of the dominant discourse in contemporary Swedish society on good parenthood, namely being an involved parent. This is not always an easy task,

as the involved parent is often presented with difficult choices and must balance between non-involvement (e.g., encouraging children to develop independence and individuality) and deeper involvement. Willett and Wheeler (2021) note that parenting in its common usage emerged after the 1950s and was "framed as a set of skills, subject to surveillance by the state" (2021:723). This set of skills is tightly bound to moral questions, as they are highly normative in nature. This includes managing technological risks, supporting development and managing overall risk on behalf of children. Parents are expected to always maintain control and be aware of "their children's activities and whereabouts in online spaces, as well as in physical spaces outside of the home" (Jeffrey 2021b:202).

This perspective of individualization is largely dependent on resources available to parents in their everyday lives, which is inherently dependent on socio-economic contexts (Schofield Clark 2013). Parenting is also a gendered affair, where mothering and fathering contain different understandings on the responsibilities of the respective parent, often materialized through dominant ideologies such as traditional values (Kushner et al. 2017). These values posit that the mother is the primary caregiver, while the father's primary role is to secure economic resources. As Westerling (2023) notes, little attention has been given to the fact that "ongoing individualization changes conditions for contemporary fatherhood" (2023:358). The larger context in which families themselves are included is inseparable from the sites where parenthood, caregiving, motherhood or fatherhood ultimately happen. This includes the spaces where the families' media practices take place, which are not always given sufficient attention (Lafton et al. 2024). For example, dimensions of values, technologies and the space in which the media is used can manifest in imaginaries around gaming (Chambers 2012b).

While these perspectives stem from an institutional and state perspective, they are often empirical undertakings, where interviews with parents themselves are analyzed. The discourses presented have an impact on what is imagined as good parenthood and what that entails. In a roundabout way, Jacukowicz et al. (2016) study parent's perception on ideal childhood, which inherently contains parental strategies for establishing this ideal. Others have addressed the negotiations parents face in children's digital media use, where child development is at the core of these negotiations (Jeffrey 2021a). The negotiations parents undertake in their daily lives are addressed by Sparrman et al. (2016) and Sandberg et al. (2021), who emphasize the importance of understanding the reflexivity of parents in

negotiations of morality. In quantitative approaches, imagined parenthood has been conceptualized as systems of belief, for example, global perspectives on what good motherhood entails (Mesman et al. 2016). Both imaginaries and negotiations become central for understanding parents' views of the institutional perspective. This duality functions on many levels, both in negotiating the normative aspects of being a good parent and in the implementation of practices in the everyday. The notion of good parenthood has also been explored through comparative studies of how "mommy" and "dad" blogs construct morality (Scheibling & Milkie 2023). In a psychological study, Abels et al. (2024) highlight how appropriate mobile phone use is linked to notions of good parenthood, where the concept is largely understood as being present and giving sufficient attention to the situation in which the child uses the device.

The "best intentions principle", introduced here as another perspective in framing morality and parenthood, revolves around understanding parenthood through legal perspectives on morally good parenting (Millum 2018). These are used as guidelines in legal disputes when making decisions that involve children. As Millum (2018) suggests, there are two distinct pathways in understanding the principle. Here, "the best interests of the child might be the paramount consideration," trumping other considerations while still not "always determinative of what should be done" (Millum 2018:129). This is one example of how the discursive construct of good parenthood is established through institutional use (e.g., laws), opening up a discussion on power relations between discourses and parents' own experiences and beliefs around good parenthood. In many ways, this is a perspective that puts forward a notion of a moral parent, whose morality is seen as the most eminent in terms of decision making and commitment (Ferracioli 2023).

Parental mediation and risk

In parenting and media specifically, a substantial body of research relating to children and media technology centers around risks. When the focus is shifted to parents, the mitigation of risks is often brought to the forefront. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) determine that "[t]he latest media technologies have always raised people's hopes and fears, necessitating shifts in family practices and public policy" (2020:9). In the past few decades, the number of children using or owning smart phones has increased drastically, which affects the amount of time spent online. By extension,

the question of media technology and internet use is "internalised as part of good parenting" (Kalmus et al. 2022:1027). This also includes the ways in which moral questions on parents' own media use are transferred to practices around their children's media consumption (Cingel et al. 2024).

As Martinez (2022) notes, this parental mediation focuses on risk mitigation and "maximizing opportunities" for children. Historically, the theory of parental mediation has its roots in a media effects perspective (based in psychology), as well as theories of information processing (Schofield Clark 2011:323-324). Parental mediation theory suggests that interpersonal communication in the family is an important area of study for understanding the ways in which parents mitigate the risks of children's use of media technology. Theories around parental mediation are prevalent in psychology, behavioral science (see Priya & Uma Maheswari 2023; Deng & Luo 2024) and communication studies. The approach has at times been criticized for being entrenched in the era in which it was conceived (the 1980s), thus focusing on television as the main object of mediation (Jiow et al. 2017). For example, Valkenburg et al. (1999) identify different styles of this mediation around children's television viewing, noting that instructive, restrictive and social co-viewing are common practices. In the digital age, an ensemble of digital media – such as digital games, social media, smart phones and tablets – have been included in studies that adopt the perspective (Nikken & Jansz 2006; Schofield Clark 2013). Furthermore, mediation practices have not only been studied in relation to parents but also grandparents (Martinez 2022).

While earlier studies on parental mediation focus on effects and risks, discussions around what constitutes the "effects" of the technology have been raised in recent studies (Nathanson 2001). Risk mitigation efforts concerning these technologies and its uses are based on the perceived harmfulness of media effects, which concerns "the negative effects of media on information processing and cognitive development" (Schofield Clark 2011:324). Instead of questioning what constitutes a risk or negative media effects, Schofield Clark's work highlights the importance of creating an understanding of the potential struggles parents face in their everyday lives in relation to these risks and their mediation. What connects this perspective to the work in the present dissertation is how agents (here parents) mediate and practice the management of children's screen time. While not based in parental mediation theory, the work within this dissertation deals with parents' management of their children's media use in the household. Moreover, a

phenomenological perspective can add to the knowledge provided by studies based on parental mediation by exploring how parents' mediation practices are shaped through their subjective *and* intersubjective experiences. This means that not only are the actual practices of mediation central, but also the negotiations the parents engage in within their life-world.

Children's internet use, and the media technology on which it relies, are now largely seen by parents as a "natural part of daily life" (Kalmus et al. 2022:1027), though still requiring management. Schofield Clark (2013) also attempted to broaden and deepen the understanding of the struggles parents face in the advent of new media. Within this framework, she discusses the role of media reporting on risks and what parents can do to mitigate them, as reporting often taking the moral high ground and employing fearmongering tactics (Schofield Clark 2013). Not all parents have access to the same resources, however, and socio-economic and cultural dimensions factor in terms of how parents' manage their children's media use (Livingstone & Byrne 2018). In both cases, the discussion is presented in a class perspective, where cultural and economic resources are argued to have an impact on parenting and what constitutes 'good' parenting.

As digital tools and media technologies become a 'naturalized' part of everyday life, so do the practices associated with them. However, monitoring or regulating their children's media use is not the only activity parents engage in. Given this array of activities, parents rely on prevailing notions of good parenting drawn from many facets of parenting to judge each other in terms of appropriate digital media use (Livingstone & Blum-Ross 2020). While not making any claims about correlation, Wall (2022) argues that the notion of 'good' parenting, at least from a Western middle-class perspective, "has become more time consuming, intensive and emotionally demanding" (2022:340). In the digital age, these demanding parenting practices often concern screens and risk mitigation (Sandberg et al. 2024a). What constitutes good parenthood in related discourses is often built on "middle-class values" (Fævelen et al. 2024), which then are specific sets of cultural norms.

Parenting and the moral aspects of media use constitute one of the central frameworks of this dissertation, and while many disparate perspectives around this exist, moral notions around 'good' parenthood remain relevant. This kind of morality is based on establishing boundaries around what is acceptable and not acceptable, even if the imagined practices, values and ideals are steeped in normativity. However, although this notion may allude to normative ideals and

practices, the intention in this thesis is not to reaffirm these. Rather, it is more of a subjective positioning, situating the experiences of what parents recognize, imagine and believe to be 'good' and 'bad' parenting. The contribution is a phenomenological perspective on how parents manage screen time in their everyday life, focusing on subjective experience in the life-world. Additionally, the dissertation should be seen as adding to knowledge around how parental mediation is built on certain normative values.

Media use, people and everyday life

Research on people and media is diverse, spanning quantitative demographic analyses of media use, audience reception to various media content (see, e.g., Hall 1980; Schrøder 2003; Hill 2021; Hill & Lunt 2025) and media use in individuals' everyday lives (Nightingale 2011). Audience studies, as a perspective and tradition within media and communication studies, is in many ways a crucial body of work for understanding the study of everyday life with media (Sullivan 2020).[16] In fact, several of these perspectives have had an influence on the evolution of central ideas in this dissertation. The first section, which concerns everyday life and media, will offer insights into central ideas in the study of audiences that parallel the aims of this dissertation. There is essentially one key argument to this parallel, which can be summed up as the interest in technologies and their significance to ordinary people in their daily lives. As an early example of this perspective, Herzog's (1941) *On borrowed experience* investigates women and their listening habits to daytime radio soaps, showing how the seemingly mundane experiences of female radio listeners are actually "processes of meaning making," as Schrøder (2003) puts it. Although Herzog is largely credited as the inspiration or even the originator of the uses and gratifications approach (Sullivan 2020), her leanings towards the everyday and its variety of forms is very much akin to what Carey (2009) describes as the ritual perspective on communication. In this perspective, rituals form the basis of everyday habits and lived experience, not simply as information transferred from one source to another. Herzog's empirical work can then be seen as crucial in putting forward perspectives of people as part of processes of meaning making, a tradition that has led to numerous further studies, too many to name here.

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[16] The subject of study is often referred to as 'media audiences.'

Bausinger (1984) uses similar metaphors to understand the role of media in daily life. For example, Bausinger presents the television as a means of tuning out the world when the man of the house comes home from work, with the act of turning on the television signaling alone time (Bausinger 1984). In this way, Bausinger shows how media, both as technology and text, does not need to be regarded as just technology or text, but as an integral part of the way we live our lives. Brought forward though the perspectives of Herzog, Carey and Bausinger is the point that everyday 'meaningless' media use actually holds significant meaning and is essential to understanding culture in the daily lives of modern people. Herzog's initial approach may not have explicitly articulated this significance; however, when reading her work in the broader context of audience studies and studies on the daily lives of ordinary people, her methodological approach lays the foundation for an analysis of human interaction with technology (though Herzog takes a psychological approach, which was common in early media studies).[17]

In discussing Bausinger's text, Hermes (1993) notes that Bausinger was attempting to "dethrone" the text, making it "no longer the centre that generates meanings or subject positions but an object that becomes meaningful given specific surroundings, specific context" (1993:494). While still navigating the role of the audience, Hermes brings a methodological inquiry into audience studies. It quickly becomes evident that the text and the technology on which it is experienced are inseparable from people's practices and their everyday contexts. It is here that the audience perspective provides a valuable contribution to the scope of this dissertation. Simply put, being an audience is inevitably intertwined with the variety of contexts in which we as humans interact. This interaction is not limited to people interacting with people, but also the role of media technology in this interaction.

While many of these ideas still permeate our understanding of everyday life, our contemporary day-to-day has undergone significant changes in mediation, shaping both the fabric of our everyday and traversal through the mundane (Syvertsen 2020). The techno-social contexts in which we live our lives in most Western societies remain highly relevant (Couldry & Hepp 2016; Lindgren 2022). For example, how do we think about everyday life in contemporary (Western) societies? Bengtsson (2007) accounts for how the everyday is a

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[17] The very notion of effects and limited effect studies is psychological in nature; cognitive mechanisms lie at the heart of these examinations, not social mechanism.

routinized affair, where activities are based on repetition and the familiar. However, Bengtsson notes that changes constantly occur beneath the surface, which extends to media use as well (which becomes apparent in the following empirical chapters in this dissertation). Highmore (2011) introduces the dimension of the 'ordinary' in relation to something experienced as extraordinary when discussing the properties of everyday life. The ordinary is described as "an abundance that is distinct from material plenty" (2011:5). This abundance contributes to, amongst other aspects, the social life of individuals. Everyday life is then characterized by abundant sociality, often in terms of what we might conceive of as an ordinary life (eating, working, shopping, watching, playing, etc.). What are described as media repertoires in everyday life (Couldry 2020) are not easily separable from other ordinary activities. Also, everyday life does not solely occur in what is often quite casually described as reality but also encompasses digital means of existence (Markham 2020), such as social media. As Markham (2020) puts it, "whatever the digital brings into being is just as real as anything else" (2020:2). In this dissertation, this ontological conceptualization is acknowledged as central to a media phenomenological undertaking.

While the everyday is then often understood as a site of the mundane, it is not without complex relationships. De Certeau (1984) explains everyday life in terms of power relations, using the notion of strategies and tactics to illustrate how everyday life is based on practices of the "weak" in relation to overarching narratives (Mannell 2017). For de Certeau (1984), there are always places of concentrated power, which can use this power as "strategies" to create and constitute their own place and their own meanings. De Certeau points to science as an example of an area that inhabits its own place in the world and from there uses its strategies (e.g., debate articles based on research) to assert itself as a position of power. On the other hand, De Certeau situates "tactics" as "the space of the other" (1984:37), where those who are not part of the concentration of power "must play on and with a terrain imposed on it" (Ibid.). The perspective de Certeau offers then addresses the relationship between the broader narratives in society and the individual agency of people living in it.[18] This is one of the

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[18] I use the term broader or societal narrative(s) in this dissertation to refer to public discourse, recommendations around screen time, expert opinions, etc. Narratives could be translated as discourses; however, narratives do not always signal specific texts; they are more ephemeral and relate to the individual experience and how they understand these narratives. In this way, the

relationships that is discussed in Chapter 7 as horizons. De Certeau also focuses on the practices of daily life, namely, what is actually done in relation to the world around us.

The perspective of everyday life has long interested sociologists, ethnographers, anthropologists and media scholars as a context for understanding the complex nature of the mundane day-to-day. Audience studies is a subfield of this research, where Morley's (1986) pioneering work on everyday family life and television stands out as a milestone in the study of everyday life and media technology. Morley focuses on the television and moves beyond the individualistic focus in an attempt to understand the family as a group though their use of television in a domestic setting (Morley 1986). As Turnbull (2020) notes, Morley's study relied on interviews with entire families, which serves as a methodical foundation to understand the power and gender relations between family members (2020:53).

In the early 1990s, Silverstone, Morley and Hirsch (1992) developed domestication theory, which provides a theoretical framework for the understanding of everyday life and ICTs (Silverstone et al. 1992; Haddon 2011).[15] The theory proved highly influential as it dealt with the introduction, adaptation and use of media technology in the home. As such, it encompassed moral questions around media technology and its uses in everyday life; for example who was allowed to use what, at what time and where. Families in domestic spaces constitute contexts within which this domestication can take place (Willett 2017; Guan et al. 2020; Nair et al. 2024). Domestication theory has in recent times been applied to areas such as digital gaming in the domestic setting (Willett 2017). It has also been applied to explore how self-identified gamer parents domesticate their children's gaming practices (Ask et al. 2021). What is also evident in the presentation of domestication theory is that there was a distinct move away from the work of audience research to a more non-media centric approach (see, e.g., Krajina et al. 2014). Silverstone et al.'s original theory of media domestication has prevailed in some branches of media studies, although it has been noted that the increase in both technologies and their mobile uses has led to a far more complex everyday arena where domestication theory is presented with new challenges (Haddon 2016).

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broader narratives are always understood in relation to how the individual understands the encounter with them.

In light of the increased quantity of media and complexity of everyday media use, media scholars have utilized both classic and more contemporary perspectives to understand these (seemingly) new challenges in everyday life. Couldry (2020) argues that contemporary everyday life is increasingly 'organized' through media to the extent that it is difficult to imagine daily ongoings without media. What this means is that mediation is central to everyday life and accounts for ordering of social life (Couldry 2020). Bakardjieva (2016) investigates the everyday in this way through Schütz's notion of the life-world, exploring how her interviewees experience mediated sociality in their everyday lives (2016:46). This is another example of a study that is essentially non-media centric in its scope, instead offering a look into the social world of the respondents without focusing on the content of a specific technology. This moves these kinds of studies closer to an ethnographic approach, elevating human (user) interaction over people's interactions with the technology itself. The complexity of the everyday is, as such, mirrored in the research within media studies itself. What this perspective brings to the table is a vantage point from which researchers can view the family, and thus parents, from a group and practice perspective. Even when this theory is not explicitly utilized, its influences can be seen through the focus on social interaction within the domestic space, with special attention given to the way that interaction is understood in regard to media technology. Everyday life is often conceptualized as the 'mundane' (Sandvik et al. 2016), which signals routines and everyday rituals within the family, an important aspect of the interactions between parents and their children.

The present study explores a similar context, perspectives and research as the studies presented above. The dissertation is based on the study of a certain group of people, parents and their mundane day-to-day. While media technology is a large part of this everyday, the way it is used, negotiated and managed remains far more relevant in understanding the phenomenon of screen time. Screen time is, in many ways, media as practice (see Couldry 2004), practices that build on certain values, ideals and meaning making processes. While the technological object is relevant as a dimension of these practices, it is in the uses (and how these uses are negotiated) that parenting, morality and everyday life materializes. This dissertation should be understood as an addition to knowledge on the moral aspects of everyday life, parenting and media use in family life.

3. Frameworks

As the title of this chapter suggests, the following sections present the different contexts and lenses though which the empirical material is placed, explored and understood. While the introduction and the previous chapter have provided an overview of the core arguments in this dissertation, the present chapter is an expansion on several of the arguments presented in the introduction and Chapter 2. The following chapter is arranged in two distinct parts. The first section of the chapter is devoted to the theoretical frameworks that operate in the analysis presented in the subsequent empirical chapters. This section introduces the conceptual ideas around practices, reflexivity, morality, parenting and phenomenology as theoretical tools. The latter part is dedicated to methodological and ontological questions, as well as issues of methods, such as ethical considerations and the interview method. This includes sampling, the interview process, and discussions of limitations and demarcations in relation to these processes.

Experiencing, negotiating and doing parenthood

There are three main objectives of this section. First, it presents a discussion of the overarching phenomenological framework as a theoretical application. As the phenomenological perspective consists of multiple trajectories, concepts and philosophical ideas, it will need to be condensed to what is actually operational within the dissertation. Second, there is a need to understand how the concept of practices is used within this dissertation, which is clarified in the following section of this chapter. As it is a central concept, it is important to clarify what is meant when using the term "parental practices." What is unique about the term and how does it help our understanding of the everyday lives of parents? While this section introduces the conceptual notion of practices upon which the concept is based, the second part focuses more specifically on defining parental practices. The first part of the section, *Practice-based approaches*, should be read as a broad theoretical overview of practices but does include the specific concepts that this dissertation

builds upon. The third objective is to introduce another concept that permeates this dissertation – namely, contemporary parenting and ideals related to social class. This is largely based on the theories of Hays (1996), Furedi (2008) and Lareau (2011). This is also a broad concept that has been utilized and discussed in a plethora of disciplines and formats. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the application of the different frameworks and their operationalization in the subsequent chapters.

Social phenomenology

Phenomenology, as an approach in social research, is to be understood as a framework for understanding the specifics (details) that are part of the whole of everyday life (Bengtsson 1998). Phenomenology is used as a descriptive and interpretative method of understanding, focusing on the world as it is experienced on the individual level, without attempting to explain why everyday life is the way that it is. It is descriptive in the sense that it undertakes to describe – an experience must be described, often in detail, to be able to be interpreted.

The lived everyday life, or the life-world (Schütz & Luckmann 1973), is the subjective site of experience and differs from the transcendental world we all share. In this view, the notion of experience is central (Sokolowski 2000). Individual experience is not a universal explanation of the world; it is not to be reduced into categories (West 2010) as it is unique and highly subjective. However, from a phenomenological perspective, the world in which we live is seen as intersubjective, as it is built on social relations and interactions. The world that we experience is not, as in Cartesian philosophy, a construction of the mind, a reflection of something ideal and 'true.' It is a world that is tangible and real in itself; it transcends the individual. Thus, it is also a world that is shared among the people who inhabit it. There are no multiple versions, only different experiences. In the first paragraph of the book The Structures of the Life-World, Schütz (1973) states that the undertaking of a phenomenological description of the everyday life-world is "prescientific," referring to it as a "province of reality" (Schütz & Luckmann 1973:3). What Schütz means by this is that the life-world encompasses the subject matter in a way that is highly contextual. Schütz goes on to assert that our experience of everyday surroundings is based on an individual's natural attitude toward the world, whereby the life-world is a setting that appears "real" to individuals, a world taken for granted (Schütz & Luckmann 1973:4).

Within the life-world, individuals are presented with objects and other individuals, as well as cultural and social norms. The life-world is where we make sense of ourselves and others. Schütz uses the notion of the natural attitude (Schütz 1970; Schütz & Luckmann 1973) to illustrate the very fabric of an experience as it is directed towards the world as it appears before us. The natural attitude posits that the world is in many ways unquestionable and taken for granted – we do not reflect on or question every detail of it. As Husserl (1995) notes, one can think about and ponder one's place in the world and the relation one has to specific objects, however, this is done from the vantage point of solid ground (1989:70). For example, we do not question the atoms and particles of the screen on our smart phone every time we come into contact with it; the construct is as it appears to us, a solid black and often shiny screen.[20] However, the fact that the screen is made up of atoms and particles is not in question. This makes phenomenology as a philosophy unique: it does not disregard the natural scientific explanation of the world but focuses on our lived, everyday experience of it (West 2010). This means understanding the world as intersubjective, as we share this conscious way of being with other subjects.

Furthermore, experiences of screen time as a phenomenon in parents' life-worlds demand an understanding of these experience being of something, referred to as intentionality (Sokolowski 2000). Experiences of screen time are shaped by the intentions carried into the experiences and are subjected to certain values, ideas and practices. Simply put, in order to elicit an experience, a feeling or an emotion, something must elicit it – a phenomenon or an object (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). For example, when screen time elicits a certain feeling, it is always in relation to a phenomena towards which the feeling is directed. This means that intentionality lies at the heart of investigating screen time as something valued and meaningful to the parents. In this dissertation, intentionality is not consistently referenced. However, the concept provides a cornerstone of phenomenology that is present throughout, albeit formulated in other ways (e.g., as value or meaning).

Both the methodological and theoretical approach in this dissertation are, to varying degrees, based on an understanding of the world through

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[20] Of course, one can question and think about these subjects. The point being that phenomenology builds on the idea of taking these things for granted as a part of our everyday lives. We can wonder about them, but we still live with them as real and tangible objects of our lived experience.

phenomenology.[21] Certain distinctions between the theoretical and methodological application are important to consider, as the theoretical application is more important to the understanding the empirical material, such as the interviews. The level on which the concept of the life-world operates, for example, is closer to the analytical conclusions than the methodological aspirations. Aspects of the life-world include an objective, tangible world in which the subject experiences the facets of daily life, which is wholly intersubjective. One of the important facets of this concept is that this world appears as 'natural' to individuals living in it. The routines, rituals and everyday habits of people make the life-world appear as a fairly constant continuation (see Schütz 1970; Giddens 1984; Bausinger 1984). More importantly, however, is that it is understandable and coherent to the individual who experiences it. In this dissertation, there is inevitably both a theoretical and methodological overlap between sections that refer to different aspects of the phenomenological approach.

As the concept of the life-world can be seen as all-encompassing, it is largely in the contextual sense that its strength lies. By understanding the world as prescientific, Schütz (Schütz & Luckmann 1973) states that there needs to be an understanding around how individuals experience the world in which they live, the ideas that influence their actions and thoughts, their interactions and what they feel is "real." The life-world is bound to the subject, but it is important to note that it also transcends the individual (Bengtsson 1998). The world, in phenomenology, is a shared world which remains tangible and is never "illusionary" (Bengtsson 1998:19). The way the world is presented to us is in a concrete form, we can touch, feel, see and explain the objects around us. Further, as the world is a shared place among individuals, we experience similar things and can understand each other's experiences, even though they are never exactly the same. Building on the argument that the world is "prescientific," Bengtsson also describes it as "pre-reflexive" (Bengtsson 1998:20-21). The world exists objectively, but it is with people's experience of it that it becomes reflexive, something we can reflect upon and attempt to understand.

The very essence of understanding human experience, according to the phenomenological approach, lies in this contextualization. As Highmore (2011) states, "[o]ne person's ordinary is another person's extraordinary" (2011:6). To be able to speak (or write) about an individual's experience is to understand their life-

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[21] A further exploration of the conditions of such a methodology is presented later in this chapter.

world. Highmore continues to describe the ordinary as a "process" – not something that always remains the same, even if we experience it that way in the moment. The life-world is not static in that sense either; as individuals' values change and adapt to new situations, such as having a child and becoming a parent; moving to a new house, city or country; getting married or divorced; making new friends and starting new jobs. It is, however, something that individuals see as 'natural' – a world that is ultimately made sense of. This is described as the "natural attitude" by Schütz (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). Husserl (1995) argues that this attitude towards the world is based on the "possibility of knowledge," which becomes unquestionable. Knowledge is always available to attain in the life-world; however, it is not constantly sought after, as living such a life would be unsustainable.

What is described is, in other words, a 'coherent' way of experiencing the life-world. As people adapt to new situations, it is still, more often than not, a coherent process. They are (somewhat, at least) aware of what to expect when living within a world that shares experiences on a group and societal level. These expectations are based on both reflexivity (see theoretical discussions on reflexivity under "Reflexivity and agency") and the perceived naturality of the world (Husserl 1995). The life-world is, as such, an "intersubjective" one, as people do not usually live isolated from one another – they share values, cultures, ideas and practices (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). It is coherent in that individuals can sense what to expect and learn from it. As Schütz puts it, as long as we find a coherent pattern of experience in our life-world, we can "repeat [our] past successful acts" (1973:7). In essence, this is what the notion of taken for granted refers to – a sense of the world as something that will react in roughly the same way through similar practices. Understanding how an individual, such as a parent, makes sense of the life-world, is to begin to understand what the individual experiences as 'real.'

Small life-worlds and horizons

Even though the life-world relies on certain closeness and distance, different ideas, norms, materials and actions are not always readily available or apparent, what Luckmann (1970) refers to as "the small life-worlds of man" (1970:581). Luckmann's account is partly historical, using traditional small communities, such as Western agrarian societies before industrialization, to illustrate a contained life-world that has undergone drastic changes in modern times. In these societies, individuals were not directly linked to the larger society but by links that were

intermediary […]: the feudal landlord who dispensed the justice of the king; the *starosta* of the *mir* who collected taxes for the tsar; the distantly related bureaucrat who as a minor official in the capital could intervene in behalf of a deserving cousin; the travelling salesman who told his tall stories of the Babylonian wonders of the city; the visiting opera company which performed the legendary events of the cosmological myths, etc. (Luckmann 1970:582)

This was often an incomplete account of the larger world, told by second-hand accounts. However, with industrialization and the move into larger communities, Luckmann sees the individual as having "socially undirected and uninhibited (though certainly not unlimited) freedom" (1970:568). People no longer have a concrete purpose as in traditional communities but are left with small life-worlds that are all context dependent. As Luckmann puts it: "The life-round of modern man is not of one piece" (1970:587). What Luckmann offers is an understanding that even though the life-world can be seen as something that completely encompasses an individual's life, the different spheres, situations and contexts people find themselves in are fragmented and not always recognizable as a coherent whole. An individual is "a part-time citizen in a variety of part-time societies" (Ibid). By living in these "part-time societies," such as the workplace, the home or the school, an understanding is developed of how that small life-world is constructed and what applies in a certain context. However, just as with traditional societies, there are horizons that give people more or less distinct images of the surrounding world. When parents are in their home, they are not cut off from the world around them; they experience an abundance of ideas, norms and values in their private sphere, especially in the media-saturated modern-day. The concept of the small life-world can thus be applied to understanding the often fragmented contexts of parents without disregarding their relationships with the larger world that surrounds them – the horizons of the experience.

Horizons are thus a phenomenological concept that seeks to explain how experiences rely on specific contexts within the life-world of individuals.[22] The concept refers to the actual perceived relationship between the individual, the experience and social contexts, as well as the contexts themselves – always from the vantage point of the subject (Schütz 1970). Horizons describe how we

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[22] Distinctions are often made between inner and outer horizons of experience (see Schütz 2002). This is a distinction that will not be central in this dissertation. Broadly speaking, when horizons are referred to here, the author is referring to outer horizons.

experience *parts* of the realities of the world around us, that which is, at the time, relevant to us (Schütz 2002). They are the phenomenon's relationship to broader narratives and ideas, discourses and contexts, acts and imagined acts, as experienced by the individual in relation to their life-world. Gutierrez (2023) explains that "the phenomenological horizon is the limit circumscribing the clearing which is the space in which experiential objects can appear" (2023:529). Horizons are the limits of what can be experienced in relation to a certain phenomenon in a specific situation, which can be temporal, cultural or perceptual. This limiting aspect is important, as it limits what can be related to the specific experience. The phenomenon itself does not contain horizons inherently; rather, the horizonal is part of the individual's experience of the phenomenon. Simply put, horizons are the perceived possibilities around a phenomenon that an individual experiences (Gutierrez 2023). To use Husserl's (1995) argument, horizons are part of the knowledge that, at any given time, is available to us.

Horizons are related to an individual's ability to "determine" (Schütz 1970) a phenomenon. Determinateness concerns making sense and retaining knowledge around specific phenomena, where a high degree of determinateness signals a high degree of knowledge of said phenomena (Schütz 1970). In some ways, this means that phenomena that are determined to a higher degree in an individual's life-world are experienced as more tangible and are often easier to place within related contexts. Geniusas (2012) states that the limit of the horizon is in itself a determination; it is the perceived context in which the phenomena appear to us. That does not mean that the horizon is static, or that our determinateness is not susceptible to change. In retaining new knowledge and experiencing new situations, we are "changing the situation we find ourselves in: by drawing nearer to the indeterminate line, or by moving away from it" (Geniusas 2012:2). A horizon, then, can become clearer or more diffuse, depending on our experience and its determinateness. In the example of screen time, this can relate to how certain parents view the content on the screen as more important than time management, or how screen time recommendations are understood as part of the experience of the phenomenon.

The relationship between horizons and the parental experience lies in how the life-world consists of multiple and transformative horizons. Horizons define what possible contexts an individual may refer to when talking about, for example,

screen time. This is always from the subjective experience. If a parent expresses that they feel screen time is in some way harmful, this is a horizon in that it creates a context for the experience, albeit a subjective one. The ideals and norms then embody these experiences and horizons, while also reaching beyond the subjective experience. While it is only the parents' practices, negotiations and experiences of screen time that are investigated in this dissertation (and not, for example, mass media debates), screen time can be investigated as a broader phenomenon of knowledge through the parents' statements. Their experience, specifically in intersubjective terms, is part of the mythologization of specific media, uses and phenomena (Chambers 2016). As a myth, in the Barthesian (2009[1972]) sense, it is collectively shared in cultural contexts. The horizons, on the other hand, are not shared in the same sense (although the parents may refer to the same contexts). These two concepts thus constitute two levels of inquiry. Investigating experiences of screen time provides insight into certain aspects of the mythologization of screen time, while horizons provide an understanding of the subjective intentionality and determinateness of the phenomenon and its perceived contexts.

Moral dimensions of everyday life

Morality can be broadly understood as the everyday values, based on perceived ideals and norms, which permeate negotiations and practices. These include the theorized norms of modern-day parenthood (see section later in this chapter on Furedi and Hays). Morality is built on the motives behind actions and ideas (Herman 2000) that situate something as 'good' or 'bad'. These are not socially arbitrary ideals or transcendental modes of conduct (Sterponi 2003); rather, morality is based on systems and orders of ethics, which are culturally and historically situated (Putnam 1990; Taylor 2004). Ethics and morals differ, as ethics often constitute the systems of belief in a specific culture, while morality is the process in which these ethics are mediated (such as everyday parental practices). While not entirely explicit, the belief system, or "moral order" (Taylor 2004) presented in the present study is that of modern-day parenting norms in which morality is studied through the lens of parents' statements and negotiations. Ethics are thus internalized and expressed as morality (Herman, 2000). In this dissertation, the system of ethics (what the parent relates to) and morality (what is actually expressed) constitute two sides of understanding parents' moral negotiations in the context of the digital age.

Everyday morality can then broadly be understood as how "a situation of need makes an on-going claim on your resources" (Herman 2000:30). How this "need" is perceived and negotiated, and why it is seen as requiring different "resources," is central to the arguments presented in the present study. In the context of this dissertation, Putnam's (1990) notion of morality is primarily used. As a pragmatist, Putnam views morality as historically and culturally situated and focuses on how morals are based on "motives of duty" (Putnam 1990:150).[23] Putnam further argues that specific values within specific cultures are considered "truths," for example, the explanations provided by biology or physics. This also reflects the endeavor within the natural sciences to achieve an "unattainable" objectivity (Festenstein 1995). However, these truths are thus perceived as objective in societies, and their moral features become invisible. Modern, Western cultures are rife with such truths, with screen time and the harm it causes – perpetuated by neuroscience and psychology – being one of these truths. These perceived objective constructions of the world impact our motive of duty (Putnam 1990), that is, our moral stance towards certain phenomena. It is through ideas of reason around what is morally 'good' that perceived objectivity is formed. As Putnam (1990) argues, objectivity and rational thought is based on an assured sense of being right (1990:136). As with Husserl's (1995) idea of natural thought, certain perceived truths are unquestionable in everyday life.

Putnam's (1990) argument, in part, is that while objectivity may be unattainable, it is justified by moral means in cultural contexts. As discussed in Chapter 2, screen time is often referred to as "excessive" in research, which relies on rationality. At the same time, it is valued within the context; the term "excessive," when referring to screen time, is clearly based on underlying values. The notion that screen time relies on something that can indeed be "excessive" (even if it is not clear what this entails) speaks to its moral dimensions as seemingly unquestionable. This guides the motive of duty. Within the present study, a motive of duty should be understood as an approach that aims to improve the world, whether it be directed at oneself or others (such as children). This is based on contextual, cultural and historical ideals and ideas of rationality. While the knowledge produced within these contexts is certainly not final (Putnam

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[23] Motive of duty is also present in Kantian moral philosophy (see Weber 2007), where morality is also usually understood as a duty towards the perceived good. In the Kantian sense, this duty is often believed to be separated from emotions or empathy, which differs from Putnam's argument.

1990:138), the stability of their unquestionable features remains. The parents in the study express, mediate and negotiate these seemingly objective ideals, while relating them to their moral position around the phenomenon (here screen time).

Competence and meaning as practices

The term practice conjures a multitude of different images and ideas. As a central part of this dissertation, the term practice is used to denote a composition of understandings that imply that an action is performed by an agent. While theories around practices have been formulated in different ways in social theory, this section will elaborate on the concept and how it is used. The emergence of the term practice theory is often credited to Bourdieu (2010) as an attempt to understand the intricate relationship between structure and agency (Harker 1990). Bourdieu (2010) famously developed his field theory based on this understanding of practices, which revolves around taste and social class. Parenthood could be considered a field in itself, with its own set of symbolic capital. However, in this dissertation, this line of thinking about practices only serves as a starting point from which a more elaborate analysis can be presented. The term practices not only describes the way in which certain fields construct meaning with respect to different kinds of capital, it can also be understood as a theoretical framework that can be used to understand social change and transformation (Shove et al. 2012).

In this sense, the term practices sees peoples agency and action as forming the structure of change, rejecting the idea that "change is an outcome of external forces, technological innovation or social structure, somehow bearing down of the detail of daily life" (Shove et al. 2012:3). Technologies and uses are thus linked to practices as they "exist in infrastructures and socio-technical relationships that occur at larger scales" (Magudda & Piccioni 2019:45), which are inseparable from social practices. What this means is that practices are constitutive of the "structures" we perceive as existing all around us, be it gender, social class or ideas and norms around parenthood. Structures do not simply exist; they are upheld, shaped and established by peoples everyday practices as agents.

Couldry (2004) argues that media is part of an increased focus on practices, instead of text interpretation (see Hall 1980) or media production. Couldry proposes this shift in perspective as a paradigm shift towards "the study of the

open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media" (Couldry 2004:117). A centrality of practices, Couldry (2004) argues, would involve a decentering of media texts, an approach that is still used in certain areas of media and communication research. This would shift attention away from media effects, which have dominated the field since the early 1940s. Couldry's (2004) perspective is valuable as it does not relay narratives of consumption or audiences as an over-arching categorization of interactions with media. Instead, the term practices refers not only to what people do with media, it also lends greater attention to how these people categorize their doing. Couldry's (2004) notion of practices emphasizes how interactions with media not only present a "range of practices" (2004:125), but also pays special attention to the contexts in which these interactions occur. Couldy also takes into account how practices are linked to each other, creating further understanding of the meaning of specific media practices. A central aspect of this dissertation is the concept of negotiations and their relation to practices, an understanding that is consistent with Couldry's (2004) argument. Simply put, negotiations are the ways in which individuals categorize their practices.[24]

Shove et al. (2012) continue the argument that practices not only refer to the actions of people, but "are defined by interdependent relations between materials, competences and meanings" (2012:24). This perspective relies on the notion that practices are remade or renewed as connections between their elements, which aligns with the understanding of practices as central to what is perceived as social structure. For example, the way that parents negotiate their children's use of screens is dependent on a (somewhat) consistent practice, which involves material (screens, technology), competencies (how screen use is regulated) and meaning (why screen time needs regulation).[25] As practices, this should be understood as an "active integration" (Shove et al. 2012:24) of the dimensions mentioned here, which means that they can be studied as a conscious set of actions, although not always deeply reflected upon. The term practices refers to a routinization of actions and meaning; however, as discussed above, it is not an end point, but a process. Nor should the concept to be understood as a singular and isolated

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[24] For example, the ways in which parents negotiate what it means to be a good parent in contemporary society, as it relates to the spectrum of screen time management practices they employ in their everyday lives.

[25] This is one of the central aspects in Chapter 5 and will be elaborated on further in that chapter.

"event." For example, parenting is an ongoing set of practices that has links to other ideas and other practices. Shove et al. (2012) argue for these links as broader perspectives:

> This hints at a much more elaborate picture in which diverse elements circulate within and between many different practices, constituting a form of connective tissue that holds complex social arrangements in place, and potentially pulls them apart. (2012:36)

The way in which practices uphold and potentially pull apart these "complex social arrangements is key in investigating social change" (Shove et al. 2012). While this dissertation does not examine social change in detail, the arguments that Shove et al. present offer a compelling understanding of how practices work in everyday life. The reliance on practices as a set of links between crucial elements enables a study of everyday life to focus on people's actions and agency as constitutive of overarching discourses and narratives. Another key term is "agency." act in itself (1984:9). For the purpose of the present study, agency is understood as the parents' as ability and capacity to perform certain practices, even if they are not practiced. This places practices at a more advanced conceptual level, which allows social inquiry to not only focus on what is done, but what could have been done. In Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration,[26] he argues for seeing structure as something beyond the functionalist or structuralist understanding of the term:

> One of the main propositions of structuration theory is that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (the duality of structure). (Giddens 1984:19)

This means that structures (i.e., ideas, norms and values) and practices are not mutually exclusive; they are not two different entities that can be examined solely on their own terms, including their relationship to technology and technological phenomena. Structure, understood as a set of social rules and thus containing social norms and values, are "produced and reproduced in interaction" (Giddens 1984:25). Investigating the everyday of parents means that the so-called structure

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[26] Structuration theory is one of the theories used as a basis for the arguments in Shove et al. (2012).

of everyday life becomes visible in that such a study uncovers what social rules are imagined in relation to their practices. More importantly, the reverse is also true. Following Giddens, the study of practices can shed light on how agents produce and reproduce rules, norms and ideas that shape what we perceive to be societal structure.

Family practices

Practice-based approaches or perspectives can also aid in avoiding widely criticized normative assumptions around the family concept (including parenthood) as a heteronormative construct. These assumptions can make other family constellations invisible and cast a shadow over critical power relations. In response to this, some scholars have attempted to develop alternate perspectives for understanding families. Not only is this shift in perspective central to this dissertation, it also serves to exemplify how relationships between institutional structure and social practice can be understood. The perspective is grounded in the shift from family as a fixed notion or analytical concept towards a notion of family that is something that is 'done' in everyday life through "family practices" (Morgan 1996a; 2011). Instead of focusing on what constitutes a family, or understanding 'The Family' as an essentialist category of "thing-like quality" (Morgan 2011:3), the emphasis is placed on the *practices of families*, a notion initially introduced by Morgan (1996a; 1996b). Morgan's original argument allows for a greater focus on "the everyday and the routine" (Finch 2007:66) of contemporary families, in contrast to comparative research, which is situated in traditional views to a greater extent. Morgan's (2011) aim is to "highlight the abiding importance of family life" (2011:2), which is central to his arguments around this perspectival shift. The conceptual idea is based in everyday life practices and phenomena experienced by certain groups with specific identities (like parents). Morgan (2011) further focuses on the mundane, the "regular" and practices that we do not take much notice of in our day-to-day (2011:6).

Family practices, and by extension, parental practices, are also fluid (Morgan 2011). Family is done in a variety of ways and within a variety of contexts. Everyday domestic life is often separated from work or school, while a practices perspective also includes activities that can constitute family and parenting within these contexts. By design, the practices must be seen as active; that is, they come from a place of reflexivity and active negotiation (Morgan 2011). However, this

does not mean that the practices are solely visible as they are performed, Morgan (2011) includes practices that he calls "imaginary," relying instead on families' and parents' notions of what should or could be done. This connects practices to the moral framework within this dissertation, as these practices are often evaluated by the parents themselves as 'good' or 'bad.'

Further, Edwards and Gillis (2012) discuss how Morgan's (2011) focus on practices is a move rooted in a desire to break free from the normative idea of families.

> One reason why there has been a conceptual withdrawal, away from focusing on families to decentre and subsume them within a broader term, is the limits and problems identified with the normative and functionalist idea of 'the family'. (Edwards & Gillis 2012:64)

It is largely the "normative ideas" that Edwards and Gillis (2012) describe that are highlighted when discussing a desire to move towards a more practice-based approach. For example, a family does not need to provide stability to be considered a family; a family can be dysfunctional, this is widely acknowledged. However, the traditional, and sometimes excluding, idea of what constitutes a family still persists, which makes it increasingly important to break from these traditional views, enabling perspectives beyond normativity.

One strategy used to redefine the concept of family and acknowledge the fact that families are not a fixed unit but rather "constructed in everyday interactions" (Pylyser et al. 2018:497) is to apply an understanding of the family as something that individuals do in social interaction. It is thus not a universal fact that a family is built on, for example, intimacy as an ideal type; rather, family is created as individuals act out, expressing intimacy towards each other. This 'doing of family' is applicable across all dimensions of the ideal type, as most of these are in place to define the concept. The advantage of using this view of family from within sociological research is that it provides a theoretical framework that explores the cultural expectations of how a family is constructed. It enables an investigation of 'family processes' – how individuals and collectives, in their everyday lives, 'do' family (Sarkisian 2006:804). As discussed previously in this dissertation, alternative families (and research on these families) have largely been measured against the traditional nuclear family. In the theoretization of doing family, however, the traditional and non-traditional family can be placed on equal

ground. The focus is not on how a family is constructed but firmly rests on family practices. In these practices, "family boundaries" are defined (Ibid.), which offers an alternative to the historically cemented view of the nuclear family. However, a question that arises from this perspective is: when is family or parenting not done? For example, parenthood is not done sitting alone in a room scrolling through the latest Instagram posts, even if this action is performed by someone who identifies as a parent.

Finch (2007) revisits Morgan's original concept and elaborates on this in her notion of family 'display.' A family is displayed in social interactions as a way to communicate that a family actually is a family (Finch 2007). Implicitly, Finch actually addresses how this can be used to understand the display as something also done by parents. In her examples, she describes how a divorced father makes a point of communicating to his former mother-in-law that he is still a good father to his daughter, despite being separated from the mother. In this case, the father's display of fatherhood is more important in the context of the separation than during the marriage, as there is a desire to emphasize that the divorce has not reduced his status as a father, though the relationship with the former mother-in-law has taken on a different form (Finch 2007). This example provides a basis for understanding the displaying and practice of parenthood as being equally important to that of the family.

Reflexivity and agency

While the life-world in phenomenological thought is experienced as an objective and natural world to individuals, this does not mean that it does not bring disruptions, disorientation or feelings of being lost. Husserl (1995) distinguishes between natural thinking, which is concerned with the "possibility of knowledge" (and as such unquestionable), and philosophical, or reflexive, thought (1989:59). What Schütz (1973) describes as the natural attitude concerns the possibility of knowledge as "natural," while experience is often based in reflexive thinking and deliberation. It is also in this reflexive thinking that an experience can be studied and understood. Husserl (1995) argues that natural thinking enables the connections, contexts and denotations in which reflexive thinking appears. Natural thinking, or the natural attitude, is central to reflexive thinking, as knowledge cannot be obtained without coherent contexts that appear unquestionable.

Giddens' (1991) theory of structuration posits that "[r]eflexive awareness […] is characteristic of all human action" (1991:35). This reflexivity not only extends to what we are used to experiencing in daily life, it allows us to be aware of what we are experiencing and able to interpret it. This argument leads to the idea that people are also aware of potential disruptions and can be more or less prepared to deal with them. For example, if a commuter is aware that the train departs at irregular times, she is forced to continuously adapt to the situation. Giddens (1991) argues that routines in the day-to-day lives of individuals are made up of "non-conscious" actions, where we do not always need to interpret, assess and consciously decide on each and every activity in our day-to-day lives. These routines and habits make up what Giddens calls ontological security. Giddens also places this concept within the realm of phenomenological thought in that he describes ontological security as "the 'bracketings' presumed by the 'natural attitude' in everyday life" (1991:36). Ontological security is a metaphor that describes our sense of reality (ontology) and how we can feel something is real by the way it unfolds before us (security). However, the shared reality of human lives is "simultaneously sturdy and fragile" (Giddens 1991:36).

Furthermore, Giddens argues that as long as no extraordinary events occur, the sturdiness or fragility of daily life is not something that is constantly reflectedupon.[27] For example, parents do not constantly reflect on existential issues concerning why they had children to begin with, but accept this as a natural state of life. Disruptions (which Giddens refers to as chaos) in this line of thinking cast individuals into what can be called "ontological insecurity" (Strömbom & Kapshuk 2022), where everyday life is interrupted by extraordinary events. This creates anxiety, which, according to Giddens (1991), "has to be understood in relation to the overall security system the individual develops" (1991:43). When taken-for-granted everyday routines are disrupted, individuals develop anxiety, which in many ways induces a feeling of losing one's footing, stability or a sense that day-to-day life is out of balance.

Giddens' (1991) concept of ontological security is a way of understanding the inconsistencies and ambivalence in everyday life. As a theoretical concept, ontological security can help in understanding how individuals' habits provide a

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[27] Reflection and reflexivity are separate notions, where reflection is simply the analysis and recount of acts, ideals and values.

source of stability in day-to-day life, as well as how this sense of stability is affected when disruptions arise. Giddens uses the concept of ontological security to clarify the practices that are "produced and reproduced in our daily actions" (1991:47). Giddens includes practices as a foundational aspect in explaining his concept, which are based on reflexive consciousness. To put it simply, ontological security is bound to the routines and rituals of the everyday, the mundane and instantly recognizable, which give us a sense that the world makes sense, even though chaos is able to insert itself into the trivial acts and interactions of our daily lives at any time (Giddens 1991). This element of "chaos" is the indefinable uncertainty that counteracts the feeling of a consistent reality. Daily life is something taken-for-granted but is never safe from breaks from this reality. This is Giddens' main argument concerning the ontological aspect of the concept: as long as reality is consistent with our expectations, we feel secure and at ease in our everyday lives. Giddens is interested in our perceptions of our interactions and experiences with the world around us, what we expect to encounter and how we interpret these encounters. This includes the reproduction of values as structures, which occur in our daily social life through our actions in it (Giddens 1984).

Intensive parenting, paranoid parenting and social class

In the empirical material, specific values and norms frequently emerged as a notable dimension in how the parents negotiated their children's screen time. As one dimension in the dissertation, middle-class values (e.g., as described by Nelson 2010), were identified as factors that influenced the ideals, norms and practices expressed by the parents. Hovden and Roslund (2021) argue that class has not had a prominent role in audience studies or research on everyday media use. Hall (1980), who is often credited with shifting perspectives toward the empowerment of audiences and users of media, emphasized ethnicity and race as crucial themes of stratification. Similarly, Morely (1986) noted gendered practices associated with television viewing in the domestic space. The social class perspective relies on a similar approach, with the acknowledgement that "different social classes use media in distinct ways" (Lindell & Kas 2024:22). This means that norms and ideals are related to social class and tastes around media use. Using the argument presented by Faircloth and Murray (2015), these ideals are visible in the modern "demanding activity of parenting" (2015:1116), where the concept of parenting is a broader and more diverse concept than child-rearing. This can

often be related to taste (see Bourdieu 2010), as norms are based on what is considered "right" and responsible when it comes to parenting (Sjödin & Roman 2015). In this dissertation, this can be related to creativity (see Chapter 6).

Furedi (2008) introduces the term 'paranoid parenting' to argue that today's parents are highly concerned about the perceived risks to which their children are susceptible. This alarmist feature of modern parenting sems from changes in policies and expert recommendations and parents' own understanding of family life.[28] In many ways, children have been socially constructed as being at risk in recent decades (Pain 2006). Parenting is a diverse set of practices and negotiations requiring reflexivity, "often incorporating the use of expertise and an affiliation to a way of raising a child, framed in theories that attribute parental centrality to particular 'outcomes.'" (Faircloth & Murray 2015:1116). As Furedi (2008) notes, this is based on a number of different social practices; for example, increasing bans put in place by schools to ensure children's safety. This can certainly be experienced through the inflation of institutional screen time recommendations and bans on specific media for children and young people. Furedi (2008) also argues that within the framework of paranoid parenting, parents are now conceived of as interventionists responsible for mitigating the risks of, for example, children's eating disorders, violent behavior, depression and failures in school (2008:55-56). Parents are expected to spend copious, and often unrealistic, amounts of time managing, surveilling and educating their children about risks. Furedi (2008) argues that this 'temporality' has now become an important factor in contemporary parenting. Parenting, understood as broader than child-rearing, includes management and surveillance activities that extend to every aspect of children's everyday lives. Parents increased demanding insight into children's school progress and situation is one such example, where parenting is done through deeper involvement and higher expectations from these institutions.

The incessant advice, recommendations and state initiatives position parents deterministically, where parenting practices expectedly and wholly "determines the behavior of children" (Furedi 2008:186). When a parent is perceived as not living up to these standards, not being reflexive in Faircloth and Murray's (2015) words, they "are deemed irresponsible or in need of education" (2015:1118). In the concept of paranoid parenting, Furedi primarily argues that parents are

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[28] See Chapter 2 for more a in-depth discussion on these contexts.

constantly reflexive, as their choices may put children at what is conceived to be serious risk. In modern times, risk is denoted as something wholly bad, although "taking risks" can certainly be beneficial (Furedi 2008:41). This results in a form of reflexivity, often based on harm and threats, though these are not always clearly defined or immediate (Beck 2000). Screen time, as discussed in the analytical chapters of the present study, often features the opaqueness of risks, as consequences are the stuff of the unknown. The negotiations of parents are thus based on reflexivity around risks, which is done within the context of contemporary parenthood.

Hays (1996) remains one of the most influential sociologists to tackle ideas of contemporary parenthood (with a specific focus on mothers). She argues that contemporary (Western) parenting cultures rely on ideologies of intensive mothering (Hays 1996). While Hays focuses on mothering, subsequent research adapted the concept to include intensive parenting (Mollborn & Billingsley 2025). Intensive parenting is an ideology associated with a certain middle-class perspective, where the pressures of parenthood include strong notions that the parent should be able to do "everything." These high expectations are based on the logic of an intensive parenting (mothering) ideology. As Hays (1996) argues, this logic is visible from many sources, ranging from child-rearing manuals to advice and opinions from other parents. This perspective also connects to how ideals and norms around parenting are displayed, often morally, defining what is good or bad parenting.[29] According to Hays (1996), intensive parenting is inherently contradictory, as it puts a great deal of responsibility on parents, specifically mothers, to both take care of children and invest in their own careers.

Hays (1996) contributes these contradictions to the "wall" between the labor market and the intensive parenting ideology, which contain inherently opposing logics. Child-rearing is taking "individual responsibility" in upholding the intensive care "on behalf of her innocent and "priceless" child" (Hays 1996:152). On the other hand, market logics are built on calculations and profit. This puts pressures on, in Hays case, mothers, to navigate both child-rearing and their professional career, while also navigating and attempting to aggregate these logics in their everyday lives. While the focus of this dissertation is not on this divide, the logics of the intensive parenting ideology is often visible in the parents'

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[29] See Chapter 6 for an analysis of moral displays.

negotiations and says a lot about what norms their ideas around parenting are built on. The continued relevance of Hays' theories thus becomes apparent when discussing screen time and parenting. The demands that parents experience in terms of child-rearing are visible in their negotiations around the management, regulation and surveillance of their children's screen time.

Lareau (2011) builds on the middle-class perspective of parenting, examining parental class-based practices in her exploration of American families. These practices again reveal the fundamentality of the "sacred" (Hays 1996) child in parenting, resulting in class-based "concerted cultivations" (Lareau 2011). Lareau discusses how the organization and intensive promoting of children's activities are parental practices that provide children with a sense of privilege associated with the middle-class. This requires time, effort and economic resources, which depend on socio-economic contexts. While Lareau (2011) discusses this in terms of, for example, sports activities, the way parents in this dissertation cultivate their children's perceived beneficial practices (often activities other than screen time) shows how the perspective is also relevant here. Screen time can also be part of these concerted cultivations, primarily in creative endeavors.

While some have argued that Sweden's equality-based policies and solid support system for children could have an impact on the prevalence of intensive parenting (Mollborn & Billingsley 2025), many of the parents in the present study refer to, negotiate and express ideals that echo Hays' (1996) ideas. Both Hays and Furedi are therefore central to understanding the broader, often class-based context in which the parents' experiences and negotiations take place. Parental practices contribute to the reproduction of social class (Sjödin & Roman 2018), which provides a further understanding of the way in which screen time reproduces certain values and ideals pertaining to middle-class norms. The consequences of this reproduction is that, regardless of the socio-economic contexts in which parents find themselves, screen time ideals are based on "cultural aspects" (Sjödin & Roman 2018) and the specific resources available to a social group.

Operational reflections

This section is devoted to explaining the theoretical framework that will operate in the coming chapters of this dissertation. That is not to say that these understandings are in any way comprehensive or absolute. The application of

theory must be seen as a dynamic process, where a dialogue is established by the researcher between the empirical material and theory. I did not include an ongoing discussion of this in the different sections; instead, I have opted to use this section to tie the concepts together in an operational discussion. As experiences, in the phenomenological sense, are wholly subjective, there are contexts and intersubjective dimensions that impact these experiences. Failing to take this into account would make the entire endeavor of experiential research futile, except in a purely philosophical sense. This is, of course, not true, as shared social references provide an ample basis for understanding the intersubjective dimensions of experience. Avoiding the trap of solipsistic thinking, where only the person experiencing something can understand it, would be to acknowledge the life-world concept as based on shared experience in an intersubjective world.

The way the parents in the present study experience and negotiate screen time is, of course, part of a broader context, whether social or moral. A perspective on the intersubjective, as well as horizons, ties the experience of the everyday closer to that of the shared ideas, norms and values that permeate a certain society or culture. Therefore, while the concept of experience features many different dimensions, it also makes visible an understanding of the internalization of ideals in Swedish parenting culture. This perspective is fully operational in everyday life, as this is the site of negotiations and practices. Practices, using this line of thinking, are part of this equation, as values, norms and ideals are often embodied in everyday practices. Parents do things in their capacity as parents. These practices are not isolated from norms and values but are tightly interwoven with them. Naturally, the three conceptual parts of this chapter will operate at different levels during the coming chapters; however, this does not mean that they are more or less important.

In attempting to create a symbiotic theory of these different concepts, it can be easy to fall into strict demarcations, losing sight of important contexts or applying only certain parts of a theory that fit the material. This would fail to hold up as an analytical framework. Inevitably, what needs to be discussed in relation to the analytical undertaking is the ways in which the different theoretical perspectives synthesize and add to the overall understanding of the material. In order to understand, analyze and present the norms and values of the parents, we first need to understand them as such. Here, experiences are key in explicitly making sense of the parents' everyday lives, joys and struggles. However, in understanding and

making the intersubjective life-world explicit, a broader social context is added. It cannot be taken for granted that the significance of screen time in parents' everyday lives can somehow present a unified meaning, which makes the theoretical endeavor that much more crucial.

The concept of experience comprises the overarching theoretical understanding in this dissertation and is visible in all empirical chapters. The major themes of these chapters add to the understanding of experiences and negotiations of screen time, as well as of practices, reflexivity, morality and horizons. For example, Shove et al. (2012) understand social practices relating to technology as catalysts for social and technological change, which is included in the parents' negotiations as a site of contestation and consensus around said technologies and their uses (Chambers 2016). This links how something is perceived with the ways in which its uses are both negotiated and practiced. This is to be understood as the hierarchal structure of the theoretical framework.

Method and methodology

The second part of this chapter is dedicated to presenting and discussing the methodological frameworks that guide the study, as well as other methodical aspects. This includes presenting phenomenology not only as theory (see above), but also as methodology. A phenomenological perspective has implications for the ontology and epistemology of the dissertation, which is discussed in the first section. Following these discussions, the practical issues concerning the work of this dissertation are presented. This includes a description of the sampling process, interviews, data generation, participants, analysis and presentation, as well as the ethical considerations for the study. Finally, a description of the limitations of the present study is presented.

Phenomenology as methodology

The parents' experiences of screen time are the starting point in this dissertation. This means that while ample understandings of what screen time connotes exist, I attempt to approach the subject in the interviews with minimal preconceived notions. Granted, this cannot be guaranteed, as I live in the same world, have similar experiences and encounter the same discourses, opinions and objects as the parents themselves. The mindset, however, is one of naive curiosity, with prompts intended to be as absent of inherent values as possible. It is important to note that letting the experience of the parents take center stage requires (at least initially) an unconditional and unbiased approach.

The above approach demands a methodology that encompasses the totality of human experience. Ontologically, this means acknowledging that human experience is based on subjective forms of living, though in an intersubjective and wholly tangible world (Sokolowski 2000). Moving away from past conceptions of media users as purely consumers (Morely 2025), such a methodology positions media as crucial in understanding contemporary social life and social acts (Ytre-Arne 2023). In a way, an attempt at a multi-facetted analysis is about creating a groundwork to "bring statistics to life" (Haddon 2011:314). Qualitative insights provide encouragement "to reflect on the nature of what people are trying to 'do' with their technology" (Ibid.). A study that focuses on the subjective experience and practices of individuals within a given context (here the everyday of parents) needs to incorporate interactions with phenomena as they appear in the world –

the objects of experience (Bengtsson 1998; Schütz 1970). When we talk about screens and screen time, for example, we are simultaneously referencing objects and uses, but more often than not, we are also referencing what happens on the screen – the kind of content we are experiencing. Furthermore, there is no value in separating this form of experience from the practices involved in interacting with the objects, and the practices, imagined or tangible, that surround the "doing" (Haddon 2011).

This broad methodological approach risks being caught in a kind of limbo of experience, practice and materiality, where the specifics are only superficially referenced. The key is then to see these as interconnected aspects of daily life, not separate dimensions. Markham (2020) discusses this from a phenomenological perspective when addressing the embodiment of knowledge in, what he calls, our 'digital life':

> First, digital knowledge can be affective rather than conscious, merely felt rather than hard won through cognition. Second, practical knowledge is about position-taking in relation to objects encountered in everyday life, increasingly digital. And third, how we experience everyday life is less a series of discrete encounters and more about movement through an environment - in which objects often barely register at all. (2020:2)

Markham presents a compelling argument for understanding the complexity of materiality and the digital – the screens and what is experienced on or through them. As a methodological argument, this perspective emphasizes that reflections of our everyday experience of these objects and phenomena create a certain type of knowledge (Pietersma 2000). Pietersma (2000) accounts for the phenomenological tradition in an epistemological sense and concludes that putting the experiences of individuals at the core of investigation, a first-person point of view becomes central. While studies often focus on cognitive reflection of everyday life experiences, a presupposed empty stance is taken, in many ways seeing the "cognizer's" perspective as one's own (Pietersma 2000). This means paying attention to the subjective experience, as well as how this experience can be related to the commonness of the world around us.

Experiences exist in the life-world of the individuals, in the case of the parents included here, within a digital, increasingly mediated and media-saturated society. The domestic spaces in which we live are often embodied through media

technology, be it television, radio, mobile phones or laptops. What Silverstone, Hirsch and Morely (1994) conceptualized as the domestication of media technology is a process that would seem almost natural in the digital age. However, the actual process of routinizing, naturalizing and incorporating the objects into everyday life poses challenges.[30] These technologies need to be tamed to fit into our everyday lives, and their continuous development makes this process never-ending. Granted, the debate around the potential harmfulness of these technologies, and their content, is an important factor in this process. This requires constant negotiation within the confines of daily life. While the introduction of media technology in the domestic sphere often goes unnoticed, it is within continuous negotiations that the objects and practices become as much a part of the home as eating at the dinner table, reading on the couch or sleeping in bed. Media devices contain properties that go far beyond being multipurpose; instead, they are almost omni purpose. The use of these technologies has blurred the lines of production and leisure, of entertainment and information, of play and work. Modern communication technologies are simultaneously the springboard that "frees people from the ties of tradition, exposes them to new ideas and creates a new space in which they can participate as citizens," while creating "a new kind of dependency" (Kirkpatrick 2013).

It could be argued that these descriptions of lived experience constantly oscillate between traits of modernity, or late modernity, and the much more mundane traits and experiences of everyday life at a human experiential level. What is ultimately dealt with is the "everydayness" of experience (Van Manen 2014:42). Van Manen (2014) distinguishes between the "common" (as in common language or everyday language) and the origins of the common. Phenomenology, as van Manen sees it, has as its main focus in understanding and investigating these origins. This distinction can be somewhat difficult to grasp and will perhaps only become apparent in a phenomenological analysis. Simply put, in everyday practices (such as acts or language), there is an origin of deeper meaning and experience that can only be unearthed through investigation (Bengtsson 1998). This is largely in line with what Schütz (1970) sees as the importance of the observer (see Pula 2020). In undertaking studies on the everyday one ultimately

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[30] This is, of course, dependent on the individual or group who engages in this process. Some might be referred to as digital natives, while others have a much tougher time in the digital age.

attempts to observe, describe and understand the mundane, common and taken-for-granted (Schütz 1970). Returning to my prior argument, the "commonness" of media technology and its role in the everyday is precisely such an endeavor within a phenomenological approach. Adding the perspectives of parents, parenting and parenthood, which in themselves are based in everyday practices and experiences, creates not only a contextual site of exploration, but also an additional dimension of everyday life. This dimension is reliant on empirical investigations.

As a methodological declaration, Fay (1999) states that "the basic question of philosophy of social science today ought not to be whether social inquiry is scientific; rather, it ought to be whether understanding others - particularly others who are different - is possible, and if so, what such an undertaking involves" (1999:5). Fay dedicates an entire book to the exploration of this declaration, raising fundamental questions about how to understand the experience of others. These 'others' need not be radically different from us; they need not come from entirely different cultures and parts of the world. While the phenomenological proposition is a focus on reflection (Cerbone 2012), it is often misunderstood as introspection. Cerbone (2012) cites Husserl to make a distinction between these two modes of understanding experience. Reflection takes into account the (shared) world and how it materializes around us; thus, it is ontologically oriented. Introspection, on the other hand, is an understanding of the self as both subject and object. A focus on reflection does not make this claim. Instead, reflection is not only the reflection of the self, but a realization of the subject of self within a world of other subjects and objects. This philosophical strategy aims, in part, to avoid falling into the trap of solipsism, which, according to Fay (1999), would mean that no social science research could ever take place.

While there are no claims of generalization in this kind of methodology, something could be said about the kind of knowledge this research creates. The present study contributes to a general field of knowledge around parental practices and specific discourses, something that is also indicative of the larger qualitative field of research (Ekström & Johansson 2019). The notion of 'general' here should not be confused with any claims that this is how all, or most, parents think and act. Instead, the aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the large field of knowledge on parents, parenting and parenthood, as well as everyday lived experience with media phenomena (such as screen time).

Epistemological perspectives and contributions

One of the issues ethnographers and anthropologists struggle with when studying culture is in understanding it as a lived everyday experience, an experience that is not always shared by the researcher.[31] Do you have to be a native to study native culture? Do you have to be a woman to understand women? These are complex questions, and an absolute answer does not exist. Fay (1996) argues that demarcating research in this sense inevitably makes all social research redundant. Adding more parameters – for example, not only being a parent but a single parent, being a parent of color, having one child or having five – can eventually result in solipsism. Only you can research yourself, as your experiences are unique to you. However, people do understand each other, even if they do not share the same traits, experiences or contexts. This opens for the realization that "[p]eople who are quite different from one another and who live in quite different situations may well have experiences sufficiently similar such that one can understand the other" (Fay 1996:17).

This type of understanding remains at the core of social inquiry, as it invites explorations of perspectives that are different from our own perspective, in many ways enriching both the study and the researcher. Another potential advantage is that not immediately sharing certain specific contexts allows for deeper questions into the unknown – a probing process that (in the best cases) focuses on the details of the social realm. The mundane experiences in the daily lives of parents – their struggles and emotions, their ideas and actions – as well as the extraordinary experiences, demand great attention to detail. In this way, my approach is similar to that of Hays (1996). Hays approaches her subject (mothers) as an outsider, taking a stance in which the reader is encouraged to take a step back from preconceived notions of the subject (Hays 1996:x). One of the pragmatic strengths of this outlook lies in asking "cynical questions" (Hays 1996:13), critically approaching everyday life with a sense of skepticism. While the abundance of ideals and norms surrounding screen time and parenting is indeed difficult to put aside when reading this dissertation, I strive for the openness suggested by Hays, which is facilitated by the distancing and outsider stance of the researcher.

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[31] For example, I am not a parent myself.

The fact that I am not a parent myself does not interfere with my understanding of the participants' experiences. Interviewing parents is fundamentally about listening and prompting them to reflect on certain events, ideas and practices. Flyvbjerg (2001) notes, in this respect, that "these self-interpretations and their relation to the context of those studied must be understood in order to understand why people act as they do" (2001:33). In practice, it is through in-depth dialogue with the parents in this study that the parents make their world understandable to me as a researcher through descriptions and reflections on their daily lives in relation to the phenomenon of screen time.

Given that this dissertation falls within the discipline of media and communication studies, the subject matter is already adapted to a specific vantage point. In this dissertation, I emphasize the 'media' aspect of media and communications studies to investigate and understand certain aspects of everyday life. Social life in the digital age is, to a higher degree than ever before, a life of mediation, encompassing almost all facets of the ordinary "and the less ordinary days" (Ytre-Arne 2023:2). The media and communication perspective becomes invaluable in societies where "digital media has become increasingly embedded and engrained" (Ytre-Arne 2023:3) as an integral part of the human experience. The sprawling nature of the field has implications for a dissertation written within the discipline. Relying solely on the approach described in the introduction (psychological methods and theoretical frameworks) to study culture would yield few answers. Instead, conceptualizing culture as lived experience is an approach that allows the researcher to understand the social world of people in a certain context – an approach that requires the application of social theory.

While substantial research has been dedicated to screen time and media use in psychological contexts, there is a need (and room) for more research that takes a social theory perspective. This dissertation is written as an addition to these further conversations, within the discipline of media and communication studies. One of the strengths of media and communication studies is the multi-disciplinary work and approaches within the field. However, this could be argued to be both a strength and a weakness. The benefit is that insights, methods and theories come from all different corners of academia, including ethnology, sociology, philosophy, cultural studies and political science. On the other hand, this makes media and communication studies a sometimes eclectic discipline, not always pinned down to a clear identity. At the same time, other disciplines have

shown increased interest in media and digital technologies, particularly sociological fields such as digital sociology (Marres 2017). However, these fields are part of a larger discussion that will not be covered here. It is nonetheless this dissertation's outset to utilize this eclectic body of research to broaden the understanding of parents and their life-world.

What has been raised throughout this epistemological discussion is the importance of parents' perspectives and an understanding of their situation in the digital age. When appearing in mass media forums such as television, radio or newspapers (either traditionally or online), parents are rarely presented as experts, and their concerns are addressed from a layperson's point of view. However, apart from psychologists and neuroscientists, this is the most common way people encounter opinions on children and media technology, at least through mass media outlets. This is not something that should be disregarded or trivialized. Psychological and neuroscientific perspectives allow for certain explanations; however, these disciplines cannot fully explain the social reality of living as a parent. The hypothesis and study of connections between screen time and neuroinflammation, for example (Verma et al. 2024), do not account for everyday encounters with representations, images, ideas and calls to action, nor how parents and caregivers actually feel when confronted with these things in relation to screen time. The context often calls for methods and perspectives from outside the natural sciences or psychology. At the same time, families' and children's media use, with its horizons of harm, danger, opportunity and promise, is something that parents face daily. The world is both a social world and a cultural world, and while medical perspectives offer understanding across many different issues, they cannot provide a holistic picture of screen time. Rather, social research on screen time adds valuable and indispensable insight into parenthood and parenting that is an integral part of this holistic view.

Parenting is largely rooted in negotiations and practices in daily life, which are based on norms, moral questions and sometimes contradictory values. For example, understanding the moral world of parents within a social context is not something that can be easily achieved through psychology or neuroscience, at least not to a significant extent. A special focus on media, mediation and the social world contributes to screen time research by offering other types of understandings, helping to construct a deeper comprehension of what parents deal with in their day-to-day. Moral questions quickly become part of the

problem, as screen time often connotes a 'right' and 'wrong' way of handling the phenomenon. Parenting, through a moral lens, is not "fixed or stable; in practice, it is rather fluid and subject to negotiation" (Lind et al. 2016:3).

The question then often becomes what the words "right" or "wrong" signify in a specific context. What do parents see as good or bad parenting when it comes to screen time? How are these ideas constituted in their daily life? These questions will not be answered on a general level, as other study methods are better suited to that task. Yet, the specifics are covered within the research questions of how parents imagine screen time as a phenomenon in their life-world. In this way, this dissertation will be an analysis of (mainly) Swedish parents' reflections and experiences of parenting in Swedish society, a society that (as many in the Western world) has come to rely on media technology and digitalization to great extent. This has created what might be called a brand-new world, which seemingly transforms at a rapid pace. Understanding how parents think and justify their actions in such a world allows us to focus on specific anecdotes within a larger narrative. The greater the variety of research, perspectives and narratives available to create a holistic image, the clearer that image will be.

Sampling, participants and empirical data

The empirical material in this dissertation consists of interviews with 35 parents across 25 separate interviews. This includes traditional, heteronormative families with one mother and one father, as well as single parents (exclusively mothers). The vast majority of the parents were Swedish. All parents were residing in Sweden at the time of the interviews, and with one exception, were permanent residents. The parents age range was from 28 to 50 years of age. Twelve of the parents were fathers, while 24 were mothers. There were a total of nine interviews conducted with parents of children aged 0-6 (preschoolers), nine with parents of children aged 7-12 and the remaining seven with parents of teenagers aged 13-18 (children still living at home). An overview of the respondents' basic information, such as profession, age and ages of their children, is provided in a later section.

A majority of the parents could be described as middle-class, but this demarcation can never be clear cut. Thus, this categorization mostly came down to economic resources. Most had a university-level education, again with a few exceptions. As the aim of this dissertation was not to explicitly study social class, these dimensions

were notable as they became visible in the material. They were subsequently deemed important to analyze further. However, the parents were not asked questions that revolved around social class specifically (e.g., how the participants education or other resources affected their views and practices around screen time). The ideals that emerged seemed tied to middle-class values and are theoretically explored in the empirical chapters as a dimension of contemporary parenting. This means that many of the parents had similar values and discussed similar ideals and norms around parenthood. However, while this was not true for all parents, they all related their negotiations to recognizable ideals and norms around 'good' parenting.

All interviews were recorded on a portable recorder. The data was based on sampling that was based broadly on specific experiences (Ellis 2020), namely parents residing in Sweden with parenting experience. The participants "share a particular characteristic" (Ellis 2020); however, this characteristic is very general. The criterion for inclusion in the study was that the parents had children living at home, which spanned from families with toddlers to 18-year-olds. The interviews were mainly conducted in two waves: one in 2021, where eight interviews were conducted and another at the end of 2023, where fifteen interviews were conducted. Two additional interviews were conducted at a later date due to scheduling issues. The reason interviews were conducted in two waves was that the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the first wave of interviews, forcing alternative ways of interacting with the participants (e.g., online interviews through Zoom). However, the actual sampling process was also interrupted due to the pandemic, and it was difficult to find participants. A decision was made to postpone the remaining interviews until a later date. As my mid-way seminar was quickly approaching in 2022, my manuscript was prioritized and the field work was postponed. At the end of 2023, the field work was completed.

The two recruitment processes primarily relied on snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is applied as a system of referral, where a small batch of respondents are contacted first and asked to refer to other potential respondents, who are in turn contacted (Parker et al. 2019). In the first wave of field work, this method of sampling worked well, and interviews were conducted just before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The beneficial aspects were that the respondents who were actually interviewed had ample time to talk during the interviews. However,

almost all were reluctant to meet in person. The three initial interviewees were contacted through friends of friends (a two or three degrees of separation from myself). As I applied snowball sampling, I ended the interviews by asking for recommendations of other parents who might be interested in participating in the study. At the end of this stage, I had conducted a total of eight interviews. Three interviews were then conducted in person at the homes of the respondents, while five were conducted via Zoom. Sweden did not have a total lockdown during the initial stages of the pandemic (as in some other European countries), but my experience was that people were less engaged during this period. Many of the planned interviews were also cancelled during this period.

In 2023, when the second wave of field work was conducted, a similar strategy was applied. A total of six initial interviews were conducted during this period, as I cast a wider net to find respondents. At the end of the field work, in early 2024, the total 25 interviews were completed. This included drawing on friends of colleagues, approaching parents in the area around my home and contacting acquaintances with different socio-economic backgrounds to attract a more diverse set of respondents. This aimed to address an inherent problem with this type of sampling, where there is a danger that respondents will be homogeneous, for example, in terms of economic class or ethnicity. I ultimately ended up with a sample that was not as diverse in terms of socio-economic backgrounds as I had initially hoped; however, the sample is not overly homogenous either. Still, most of the respondents are university or college educated parents residing in Sweden. All parents identified as either a mother or father.

In qualitative research, sampling and data collection (or generation in this case) are often deemed to be finished when a certain saturation is achieved (Parker et al. 2019). The interviews yielded very rich empirical data, and after the second round of field work, saturation was achieved. This became apparent in the last two interviews, where similar arguments to those in previous interviews became very noticeable. Nonetheless, as there were two waves of field work, this requires some reflection. O'Reilly (2012) writes that "ethnography is a practice that evolves in design as the study progresses" (2012:3), which is a way of approaching both the empirical material and its generation, as well as the research questions and research design. It is, as Eriksson-Zetterquist and Ahrne (2022) note, not always entirely transparent what are the most relevant questions in the sometimes messy and opaque research process. In this study,

this has been largely limited to the interview process, calling for reflexivity throughout the research process, meaning approaches and questions have been evaluated throughout. The first wave of interviews informed the second wave, which facilitated my ability to address specific themes in greater detail in the second wave. However, the first wave of interviews did not differ in any significant way from the second wave. This means that no drastic changes were made to the interview guide; rather, it was in the interview situation that the experiences from the first wave were apparent.

The research design was altered in response to the feedback received during my midway seminar.[32] The initial proposal was to explore what the parents considered good parenting regarding screen time. The project's central question was hierarchically reversed, instead asking what screen time experiences meant to the parents. Screen time thus became the lens through which I observed the values and practices of the parents, instead of an initial normative perspective through which to study the screen time phenomenon. In practice, this had implications for the entirety of this dissertation. However, the initial material from 2021 was not deemed to be negatively affected by this reconceptualization. In analyzing the material, the same types of arguments and questions were available in nearly equal measure from both waves of interviews.

Basic information on the participants

As an overview of the empirical material, this section is dedicated to providing basic information about the parents who participated in this study. Only broad details are provided to avoid any ethical issues related to anonymity. All participants are listed with their age, occupation and ages of their children (at the time of the interview). All names are pseudonyms. The table is sorted chronologically and indicates whether the interview was conducted with one parent or two. The gender of the children is not listed but is at times referenced in the actual analytical text in later chapters. In the table, M denotes Mother, F denotes Father.

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[32] The midway presentation of the project, held on December 7, 2022 at the Department of Media and Communication at Lund University.

Name	Age	Occupation	Children	Age/s
Max	38	F - PhD student	2	8, 13
Silje & Olof	32, 32	M - Nurse, F - Self-employed	1	3
Gerd	43	M - Teacher	2	11, 14
Doris & Erik	37, 37	M – Graphic designer, F - Self-employed	2	3, 6
Siv & Anders	33, 34	M - Nurse, F - Translator	2	6 mo, 5
Vera & Edmund	40, 45	M - Administration, F - Career counselor	2	16, 16
Lisa	38	M - Executive	2	16, 17
Mona & Frank	35, 36	M - Clerk, F - Building maintenance	1	6
Kristina & Stefan	30, 30	Both self-employed	2	6 mo, 3
Idun	30	M - Advertising	2	6 mo, 4
Beata	48	M - Student	2	8, 11
Anna	40	M - Regional development	1	6
Ylva	42	M - Preschool worker	1	7
Nina & Albin	30, 31	M - Teacher, F - Customer service	2	2 mo, 3
Tina & Olle	33, 34	M - Nurse, F - Landscaping	2	2, 5
Frida	36	M - Nurse	3	6, 9, 11
Elsa & Svante	34, 34	M - Medical technician, F - Infrastructure	2	3 mo, 2
Josefin	38	M - Editor	2	5, 9
Märta	39	M - Lawyer	2	4, 7
Mimmi	40	M - Economist	3	13, 15, 17
Pernilla & Martin	40, 40	M - Student, F - Project planner	3	4, 8, 11
Ester	30	M - Care home worker	1	8
Britta	33	M – Researcher in academia	2	2, 4
Ludvig	39	F - Teacher	3	15, 22, 25
Astrid	46	M - Teacher	3	15, 16, 18

In dialogue with the parents

In this dissertation, one general area of inquiry is the "focus on media uses as part of people's everyday lives" (Schrøder et al. 2003:58). I have briefly addressed part of the upcoming argument in the previous section, namely, that I am not a parent myself. I am, in many ways, a stranger in the social settings of the parents I have met and interviewed in this study. I am also, at least initially, a stranger to the parents themselves. This creates a challenge for the researcher to establish trust

with the interviewees and should, in many ways, be seen as an open conversation – a somewhat unconstrained dialogue between interviewer and interviewee (Ekström & Larsson 2019:101). As a process, semi-structured interviewing is unpredictable but also a very flexible tool for (co-)generating data (Byrne 2012). Knowledge pertaining to individuals' experiences, ideas and reflections are at the core of the investigation, which demands an openness to the interview and the situation where it occurs (Charmaz & Belgrave 2014).

While conducting the present study, the above description also reflects my personal experience. Using an interview guide based on central themes (see below) along with guiding questions, meeting parents have always taken the form of a conversation, where it was sometimes a challenge to keep the dialogue focused within the scope of the study.[33] This is a balancing act that the researcher must be aware of and demands adaptation. While the interviewee is the central focal point of the conversation, the interaction between the researcher and interviewee is never without context (Ekström & Larsson 2019). Parents are invited to participate in the study in their capacity as parents, which means placing their experiences in a distinct social and cultural context. Hence, the dialogue and data-generation that occur between researcher and respondent is a highly collaborative effort, though guided by a specific goal-oriented approach. Interviewing, as a method, is active – it is part of the meaning-making process in which it occurs (Brinkmann 2013). What this means in practice is that data is not just captured or gathered, it is generated in a dialogue between researcher and respondent.

Interviews were not the only method considered for generating this data. Initially, media diaries were considered as a possible option to capture more detailed everyday practices, as well as to capture them over time. This would likely have provided data offering insight into the actual lived everyday experiences of the parents, as media diaries provide (somewhat) direct information about events as they occur in daily life. Media diaries are also "untethered to space" (Miller et al. 2016), meaning that intimate and private situations not easily studied can be brought forward. This type of journaling can also help capture data as it happens, instead of relying on the participants memories and reflections on the past (Miller et al. 2016). Media diaries are, however, not as encompassing as interviews and require a significant time investment from participants. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s disrupted much of the planning in this

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[33] See appendix for the interview guide.

dissertation. Media diaries would have been very helpful during the pandemic and could have provided an initial focus to the work with this dissertation. However, as sampling and recruitment were very difficult during this period, interviews were the most viable data collection method. However, the interviews had to be put on hold due to recruitment challenges and were finally completed in 2024. By that date, there was unfortunately no time to plan and adopt new methods.

Further, participant observations were considered a way to capture the "natural setting" (Faulkner & Joshua 2013) of the parents in the domestic space. This would potentially have provided more detailed, observation-based material, especially for closely observing everyday practices around screen time. In the present dissertation, the analysis of practices now relies on the recounting and expressions of practices by the parents themselves. However, as the analysis is based on the subjective experience of the participants, these articulations of practices are highly valuable, as the parents understand these from their subjective vantage point and contexts. However, observations are time-consuming and require meticulous ethical considerations. For example, as children would be part of these observations, careful ethical considerations would be required. Ethical approval from the Swedish ethics board was also needed. To access parents in this way would require extensive planning. As COVID-19 became part of the equation, participant observations were ultimately deemed near impossible.

Regarding the phenomenological perspective, I have previously argued in this dissertation that the experiences of parents should be at the forefront of this study. This inevitably begs the question: how can something as personal and volatile as experience be captured through in-depth interviews? It is also inevitable that "any endeavour to describe it now has to rely on memories of the experience" (Cerbone 2012:11-12). While these arguments can make interviews rooted in a phenomenological methodology seem ephemeral or volatile, individuals have a strong sense of the emotions surrounding both their experiences and their ideas around them. However, it is the descriptions of experiences that the researcher can capture with interviews. These descriptions often come in the form of anecdotes or metaphors, which will become apparent in the empirical chapters (Chapter 4 onwards).[34]

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[34] Focusing on anecdotes is one of the more specific methods that is used throughout this dissertation. Within the broad concept of in-depth interviews, there are even more specific methods that can be employed.

The interviews conducted for this dissertation were divided into three larger themes, each with a variety of categories that were discussed with the participants. The three themes were: Everyday life and media, Screen time and everyday practices and Screen time and morality. While these themes were conceptualized as a way to guide the dialogues with the parents, they remained flexible to allow the participants to engage in their own negotiations around screen time. The first theme was used partly as an introduction and soft start to the dialogue. This theme contained questions about what a normal weekday looked like in the household, what media were available, how family members used them and how this usage was placed within the context of their everyday lives. This theme often worked very well in establishing a sense of ease and trust between myself and the interviewee.[35] The different queries also often created natural transitions to the next themes in the interview. This became especially apparent when the parents were asked about how they use media in their daily lives. More often than not, this question led to discussions about screen time, where the interview naturally flowed from one theme to the next.

The second theme was centered on the parents' domestic practices of screen time management. The fundamental aspects of this theme were how parents managed screen time in different contexts of their daily lives. These contexts included different times of day, different situations with their children and situations with other parents. In this theme, I was careful not to frame screen time as something negative or harmful. Adopting an uninterested stance (see Hays 1996), I tried to distance the questions as much as possible from public discourses of danger or harm. However, parents often immediately brought these perspectives up themselves. This led to follow-up questions about why they held these views and where they believed these ideas came from. Many of the questions seemed difficult for the parents to answer at first. However, after gentle probing and efforts to steer the conversation in the desired direction, most parents opened up and formulated their ideas with some sort of clarity. Some discussions were broader than this, as some parents connected their own ideals with more general ideas about screens and the digitization of society. This helped create an understanding of their negotiations on a higher level.

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[35] See later sections for more insights and reflections on the interview process.

The third and final theme further contextualized screen time and the parents' everyday lives. As morality is a theoretical concept, I used other ways to discuss this dimension with the parents. When engaging in dialogue on this theme, I asked questions about how the parents view screen time debates and recommendations, whether they speak to other parents about screen time (and if so, how do they discuss it) and why they feel the need to manage screen time (if they expressed that they do so). These questions covered many of the moral aspects of screen time. As these were only initial questions, they often led to general insights into how parents "display" their family ideals (see Finch 2007) in interactions with others. This also included me as an interviewer, as the parents often expressed their family values during the interviews. This became especially notable when the parents discussed other parents, whom they often deemed to be less able to manage screen time. Other times, they displayed self-critique, noting that they are not as good at managing screen time as they believe they should be. In these negotiations, both their family values and norms of contemporary parenthood became visible.

Personal reflections of interactions with the participants

My personal experience meeting and talking to the participants of this study was both engaging and rewarding. For starters, the dialogues with the parents went very smoothly overall. There were a few exceptions where participants were initially reluctant to talk, but then opened up as the interview progressed. This was a learning experience, as I became increasingly aware that some subjects were too sensitive to address early in the interviews. After I felt the interview had a good flow and a good atmosphere, these questions could then be asked. As an example, one father acknowledged that they had problems with screen time in their household but did not want to disclose what kind of problems. Later in the interview, the father independently brought up the issue again, discussing it in detail and revealing the core aspects of the problem. This approach proved to be effective, as I would take notes when the parents started discussing sensitive issues around screen time. I used these notes later in the interview to steer the discussion back to these sensitive issues. These issues varied from parent to parent, as what was considered sensitive and private was personal and individual in nature.[36]

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[36] With sensitive, I do not mean sensitive information such as sexuality or health-related issues.

It was important to be aware of this sensitivity. Being invited into someone's life is always a delicate situation that demands attention to the participants' well-being and emotions. While we often had dialogues around the mundane day-to-day, the analysis shows that the daily lives of parents are rich with ideals and values, emotions and rational deliberations (often in stark contrast to each other). As a researcher, I probed these issues by asking follow-up questions in an attempt to acquire a deeper understanding. This means that I sometimes felt uncomfortable and awkward, asking questions about details that the parents felt they had already covered. This became a balancing act that I managed by taking notes so I could return to questions later on if the participants felt I was probing "too deeply." Later in the interviews, when a certain amount of trust had been built, I was generally able return to specific questions and expand on certain topics. From a phenomenological perspective, this proved especially important, as I was looking for thick descriptions of the parents' experiences.

Another factor to consider is that, in dialogues, there needs to be recognition and understanding of others' views and perspectives. Not all parents shared the same values as me. In many ways, we lived different lives and had very different experiences. This was crucial for me to consider, and I made an effort to avoid letting my own personal views bias the interviews. Instead, I attempted to reframe these differing views and values by adopting a stance of curiosity in the interviews. In cases where parents (at least partially) shared my own experiences and values, it was easier to establish a level of comfort and settle into the interviews (from my personal perspective). While full neutrality can never be achieved, I tried to present myself as an empty vessel that the parents could fill with their own experiences. The other side of this experience was that I did not readily share my own views and values, except perhaps at the end of the interviews, when the dialogue was more in the form of small talk. This became a question of power relations between myself and the participants, where I felt I needed to be attentive to my own position and be very open to the parents' expressions of their experiences.

One other challenge in interviewing was formulating questions so they could be easily understood and answered by the participants. The interview guide was created to establish balance, where questions were formulated so they could be easily understood by the parents. However, the guide included a range of themes and categories that covered all areas I set out to explore. This worked well, though

some questions needed to be re-formulated in the interviews when parents asked for clarification. This did not happen frequently, but it was important to meet the individual parent (or parents) within their own context. This also meant that sometimes I could relate the questions back to previous interviews, for example, formulating questions as: "Other parents have expressed screen time as…". These tactics were, of course, only applied when deemed appropriate in order to avoid putting words in the participants' mouths.

As a closing and very personal comment, I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent with the participants in this study. They were always inviting and friendly, eager to provide their perspectives on screen time and parenting (which could be seen as a testament to the engagement on the subject). Often, we met over a cup of coffee in their kitchen, while sometimes over a cup of coffee on Zoom. The differences between these two modes of dialogue did not have much of an impact. While I felt closer to the parents in their own home, I often felt they were equally at ease during the Zoom meetings. For the sake of convenience, I could use Zoom to meet parents that lived a farther away without extended travel time. This ensured minimal disruptions to my fieldwork and allowed me to adhere to the allotted time frame. When the COVID-19 pandemic halted the planned fieldwork, I took the opportunity to go back and recalibrate the research, both in terms of themes and research questions. This became a testament to the dynamic research process at work.

Analysis and presentation

The analytical work in this dissertation has been based on an analytical inductive approach (Watt Boolsen 2007). This approach involves using the empirical material as a starting point, while simultaneously searching for certain thematic patterns. In this case, a theoretical framework can used as the basis for an abductive analytical approach. In this dissertation, the first wave of interviews was used as a foundation for the analytical and theoretical framework. Additionally, my thematic analysis was initially informed by "relevant reading, theory, and previous research findings" (Mann 2016:2011). This means that the second wave of interviews was slightly more deductive, as it was fit into an existing theoretical structure (Watt Boolsen 2007). However, the initial theoretical structure was purposefully left flexible, as new findings in the material could potentially open

for new theoretical questions or analyses. This became particularly apparent in the analysis of values related to social class.

The interviews were transcribed and used as the empirical material. At times, the recordings were revisited, where I paid close attention to the participants' tone of voice and the context in which statements were made. I kept extensive notes during the interviews, making it easier to recall and mark when certain topics were covered. The parents were informed of this approach at the beginning of the interviews, so that the note taking process did not influence their answers. My notes were an integral part of the work with the transcriptions, as they provided important information and context for the diverse discussions. Transcription is a process that allows the researcher to become familiar with the material and initially interpret its meaning (Mann 2016). The transcription is, in many ways, the first step of analysis, and many of the themes within this dissertation were initially noted at this stage.

It can be argued that the empirical material does not constitute 'data,' as it is in the qualitative analytical process that the material is constructed into data (Erickson 1986). The raw material is open to interpretation, while the data, once it has been categorized and thematically compiled, is not. The analysis of the material was intentionally flexible and primarily relied on thematic analysis. However, coding, which involves recognizing codes from the material to construct larger categories (Mann 2016), was not done in this study. Instead, categorization was the first step. This was done for one main reason. The material proved very dense, often ambivalent and contradictory, making this approach to coding overly time-consuming and counterproductive. This meant that larger groupings of categories formed the first step of analysis. From this analysis, larger themes were extracted, as "coherent and meaningful constructions of patterns" (Mann 2016:212). Several of these themes formed the bulk of the analytical data, building on the themes from the interview guide: Screen time as an everyday phenomenon, Parental practices around screen time, The moral dimensions of screen time and Parents, screen time and public discourse. While there are certain overlaps, the themes roughly translate to the four empirical chapters in this dissertation.

Some themes that were recognized did not make it into the dissertation. The reasons for this differ in the different cases. For example, a theme called Parental practices and different screens, which explored how practices and values differ between the various domestic screen technologies, was not fully included in this

dissertation. The reason for this was that the interviews and the subsequent data collection and analysis focused heavily on technology. As another example, the theme Perspectives on children's experience was partially given its own section and partly integrated into the dissertation as a running argument. The theme centers around how parents experienced their children's screen time and issues related to their screen time management practices. In many ways, this was a situation where the parents acknowledged and discussed their children's agency, essentially serving as their voices. This could potentially be problematic. However, while the parental experience remains the point of departure, parenting experiences are largely (if not wholly) based on the experiences of their children.

Several contexts informed the analytical work. The children's ages, for example, had an impact on the way in which certain themes were explored. In Chapter 5, the children's ages became especially prevalent in discussing parenting practices. A majority of Chapter 5 therefore focuses on parents of children aged 0-12 years, while a section dedicated to the parents of teenagers was added. This may at first seem fragmented; however, the analytical framework was designed to encompass all these perspectives. While the parents' competencies and their relation to meaning (see Shove et al. 2012) differed, they should still be considered to constitute parenting practices of, for example, media use or screen time management. The dynamic interplay between practices, morality and day-to-day life instead becomes a strength in the analysis. The ages of the children impact the way in which the parents' experiences are expressed, while still relating to contemporary parenting and screen time. This also provides children with agency, as parents describe how and in what ways their children's own experiences create crucial contexts for their practices and negotiations.

Working with the material demanded a positioning of theory to explore and understand the participants' statements. Phenomenology became the vantage point from which to describe and initially understand how parents' experiences happened within their life-worlds. This pertained to both the subjective (personal experience) and the intersubjective (the world around us). However, as the phenomenological analysis provided a central framework for the analysis, the dissertations' analytical themes demanded further conceptualization. Exploring the ways in which parents actually do things in their everyday lives – within the framework of their parental identity (based on Morgan 2011) – provided a further focus on practices. Practices, in this sense, are not observed. They are explored in

the ways they are reflected upon and expressed by the parents. However, this revealed how the parents drew on a spectrum of competencies, which added meaning (based on Shove et al. 2012) to their parenting practices. This ultimately made up a substantial part of the dissertation, as the expressed practices also revealed how the parents negotiated their actions in everyday life. Negotiations, practices and ideals around parenthood were quickly exposed as interlinked in the parents' lives, forming part of their subjective experience and the intersubjective life-world.

Understanding how the parents negotiated the experiences and practices in their everyday lives added another dimension to the analysis. It became clear that this negotiation was built on values and ideals, many of which were expressed as norms around parenting. The negotiations were thus often moral in character. While morality is a broad and often loose concept, it became crucial to clarify in what ways the negotiations were moral and how they were expressed. This was accomplished in part by paying special attention to the moral dimensions and how they related to the analytical frameworks. For example, in discussing Finch's (2007) notion of display, this developed into an argument around the moral displays the parents engaged in. In this way, parenting and parenthood were connected to values and ideals of screen time, as well as to contemporary cultural parenting norms (see Hays 1996; Furedi 2008). Specifically in relation to screen time, Putnam's (1990) notion of motives of duty was a perspective from which I was able to link parental competencies and practices with the parents' moral negotiations. Screen time, as a phenomenon that is already embodied by specific values (e.g., from public discourse), served as an example of parenting negotiations as motives of duty, reflecting what parents felt they were expected to do.

The practical analytical work in the coming chapters fluctuates between a more detailed analysis of individual parents (i.e., their ideals and practices) and a more thematic approach. This is a consequence of the framework, which facilitates a subjective, at times borderline-microscopic perspective, and an analysis of broader cultural aspects of parenting. This oscillation between perspectives means that the analysis has certain characteristics, which are expressed differently in the four empirical chapters. Both the parents' negotiations (i.e., the values they deliberate on and express) and their practices are subject to these shifts in perspective. An analysis of the subjective experience is thus very detailed in certain sections. However, the parents often express similar negotiations and practices, which is

taken into consideration in the analysis. There is also an oscillation between individual and more collective expressions and negotiations. In part, this is a consequence of the phenomenological analysis, which focuses on the subjective experience. I also attribute this to my own interest in the detailed analysis of negotiations and practices. My interest lies in how the parents express their values through their negotiations and practices, which at times demands detailed analysis.

In terms of presentation, the statements from the parents are often presented as longer quotations. This is done to highlight the respondents' articulation of their ideas around screen time and emphasize their subjective experiences as parents. This is done in relation to the descriptive phenomenological perspective, presenting the parents' reflections in detail as they are given. Inevitably, some clarifications were needed for readability. However, the quotations were not significantly altered from the descriptions given by the parents, and careful measures were taken to ensure the participants' own voices were kept intact.

Ethical considerations

This dissertation was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.[37] One of the main issues when applying for ethics approval in an interview study is that I had to "make assurances on the basis of guesswork" (Gabb 2010:466). In practice, the interviews were difficult to predict (which also remains a notable strength of the method). Applying for ethics approval means, to some degree, that I made an attempt to predict the participants' responses. Qualitative research on everyday life relies on flexibility and the "'messiness' of everyday experience"

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[37] Registration number for the application is 2023-03414-01.The application was entitled "Skärmtid, föräldraskap och moral - En studie kring föräldrars moraliska föreställningar kring användandet av skärmar (ex mobiltelefon, television, iPads) i hemmet". Debate and discussion around ethics approvals for social science projects (outside of, e.g., psychology experiments) was heated in 2023. The decision was then made to apply for ethics approval for the fieldwork. Sensitive information, such as sexual orientation, political views, union membership, ethnic background and genetic or health related data (European Commission 2024), was not collected and as such is not part of the material presented in this dissertation. A data management plan was followed as described in the ethics application. No recorded interviews were stored on devices that (at the time) had access to the Internet. While working with the transcribed interviews, these were kept on a USB stick and, when not in use, locked in a safe. These measures were put in place to ensure the anonymity and security of the respondents.

(Gabb 2010:462). Consequently, this means that as the project continues, there is often a need for adaptation or changes in approaches and interview guides. The phenomenological approach needs to be dynamic in nature to facilitate the (co-)generation of data that arises from the experiences of the participants. In this study, the interview guide was not changed during the course of the interviews; however, adaptations were made during the actual interviews. These adaptations included questions on the parents' relationships with other parents, or their own parents – subjects that were not clearly highlighted in the ethics application.

Parents who expressed an interest in participating in this study were sent participant information in the initial stage of the recruitment process.[38] Upon approving this information and setting up an appointment for the interview, a consent form was either sent to the parent's home or provided at the interview. This was signed before the interview was initiated. In a few cases, the consent form was read aloud to the respondents, and their approval was recorded on a portable recorder. This ensured that the parents had been provided with all important information before the interview commenced. However, to avoid entirely directing the interview, the participant information was formulated in general terms, noting that the study focused on parenting and screen time in everyday life. The reliance on generally formulated information was a way to prevent the interviews from becoming restricted or losing their exploratory character.

During the interview, I sought to establish trust and remain open to what was expressed by the interviewee. This involved opening with more general questions in order to establish a dialogue, where the interviewee became comfortable before moving on to more specific questions. While no sensitive data was deemed to be generated or collected in the study, interviews on personal family life sometimes elicit strong emotions (Pascoe Leahy 2022). Preparations were made to respond to these emotions by clearly informing the respondents that the interview could be terminated at any time, without needing to provide reason, if they felt uncomfortable or did not want to continue the interview. No respondents decided to terminate the interviews. As the interviewer, I was attentive to signs of distress and did not pursue certain subjects when it was deemed too stressful or emotional for the respondent. This only occurred in a few isolated situations. As an example, no further questions were asked when a single mother was asked if her former partner was involved in the child-rearing and she directly answered "no." It was

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[38] See appendix for these documents and the consent form.

clear that the mother did not want to answer questions concerning that relationship. Nonetheless, emotional responses are important in interviews as they allow "access to one of our most profound spheres of human meaning" (Pascoe Leahy 2022:778). A few of the respondents thanked me after the interview, stating that the dialogue was therapeutic for them. This shows that emotionally charged discussions can also be perceived as a positive experience.

While the relationship between researcher and respondent might, on the surface, seem unproblematic, there is an unavoidable power dynamic that often needs to be addressed. The participants "share their lives with us" (Pascoe Leahy 2022:777), and their experiences will eventually be transformed into results in an analysis. This is not always easy to convey and may be difficult for the interviewee to understand. What this ultimately means is that as a researcher, one must handle the material, both in the interview situation and in analyzing and presenting the data, with the utmost respect towards the participants. Nonetheless, the material generated constitutes the backbone of this dissertation and is distilled for use in the analysis and presentation. This remains a balancing act between commitment to the interviewees and the "academic need for a critical analytical mind" (Gabb 2010:461). These issues need to be addressed and reflected upon throughout the entirety of the study process.

To ensure the parents' anonymity, the study initially used the terms 'father' and 'mother' when presenting the statements.[39] The rationale behind this was to present the data as individual experiences related to a specific identity (as parents). However, this approach proved to obstruct the readability and clarity of the dissertation. After an initial analysis and draft, the material was deemed to benefit from pseudonymization. As a result, all parents were given pseudonyms to make it easier to follow their stories and statements in the completed dissertation. Further, no specific locations are named; only the names of general areas are used, such as Scania or "one of Sweden's largest cities," in order to avoid revealing the geographical location of the parents.

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[39] The parents in this study identified as either father or mother.

Methodical limitations

One of the main considerations, as discussed in a previous section, is the homogenization of the empirical material. Snowball sampling is a "network-based convenience form of sampling" (Parker et al. 2019), which relies on groups of individuals who may share similar ideals and norms. Further, this sampling method is reliant on the contacts and social resources available to the researcher, which could have an impact on different types of stratifications in the data (Parker et al. 2019; Noy 2018). In this study, this was partly mitigated by casting a wide net when initially approaching respondents. Factors considered to ensure diversification were places of work, geographic placement and relationship status. In conducting in-depth interviews, however, the focus is on the quality of the dialogues with the participants, not the quantity.

The material is based on an unequal distribution of gender. Fathers were more reluctant to participate in the study. In two cases, fathers failed to attend scheduled interviews, resulting in a one-on-one interview with the mother. This leads to a certain predominance of mothers' voices in the dissertation. While I have actively worked to highlight the fathers' voices, this imbalance is still present in the empirical chapters. However, as I have described earlier in this chapter, the mothers and fathers held very similar views, which could have many reasons. As a personal reflection, I would have wished to have more one-on-one dialogues with fathers in order to discern if there were any aspects that would have set these interviews apart (possibly introducing a gender perspective into the dissertation). In the end, only two fathers were interviewed one-on-one.

A phenomenological approach to the material means that the sample size is not as important as what is actually stated in the interviews. The sample size for this dissertation is deemed substantial, while not overly large. Ultimately, the material was very detailed and rich, and in the last few interviews, there was notable saturation. A larger sample could potentially have revealed broader patterns of practices and experiences, for example, in different living or relationship conditions. While this is not the aim of this dissertation, such patterns are interesting for further research (e.g., focusing on single parents as a thematic category). This could potentially have been explored using other methods, as discussed earlier in this part of the chapter.

Certain aspects of social stratification ultimately comprised a theme in the analysis of the data. Social class emerged as values and ideals and proved fundamental in understanding contemporary parenting around screen time.[40] As part of practices and morality, social class and norms surrounding parenthood in the digital age featured prominently in this dissertation. Nonetheless, in the analysis, I do not use theories or perspectives on gender, as the data did not reveal any apparent and concrete issues related to gender (e.g. differing negotiations or practices between fathers and mothers). This could be attributed to the openness of the phenomenological approach. Still, this is a very important dimension of social life, and this absence is open for criticism. Some perspectives may have been lost by using this approach, while others may have been gained.

Regarding the limitations of in-depth interviews, common critiques of qualitative methods, and to some extent phenomenological methodology, apply here as well. Rather than seeking some kind of "truth," ethnographic approaches lend themselves well to understanding why certain practices, actions and articulations become social values and norms; in other words, what is seen and perceived as truth. This ontological argument also covers questions of doing research in social settings or societies of which the researcher is not a part (Schrøder et al. 2003). Further, it must be presupposed that the respondents are truthful to a high degree in the interviews. As this cannot be verified, the parents' descriptions of their experiences in the present study must be assumed to be accurate. However, given the focus on subjective experience, it is this subjectivity that would need to be truthful, rather than an accurate and impeccable description of events.

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[40] This perspective was further raised by the readers at my final seminar, which led to the theme having an even greater presence in the dissertation's analysis.

4. The stuff of everyday: Routinization of screen time

The following chapter will introduce the ways in which parents in this study experience screen time, how they discuss it and its place in their life-world. A large part of the text will deal with how parents engage with screen time as a concept that is experienced consistently on a daily basis. While this chapter uses questions on screen time as its foundation, when interviewed, the parents often elaborate on screen technology, content-specific issues or screen practices in general. However, in this web of very complex and at times messy argumentation, there is often clear references and connections the issue of the phenomenon of screen time, as special meanings and practices. This chapter should be read as a point of departure for understanding the parents' everyday negotiations around screen time. In this chapter, I intend to highlight how screen time relates to different elements of the parents' everyday lives, as well as the ways in which this is done. A central concept within this chapter is that of the life-world (Schütz 1970; Schütz & Luckmann 1973) as a coherent and taken-for-granted site of experience. Additionally, Highmore's (2011) argument that daily life is a site of both attention and inattention provides a view of daily life as heavily focused on screen time as a phenomenon of regulation and as part of contemporary Swedish culture, where screens are a 'natural' part of the everyday. In what can be considered routinization work, the chapter involves how this "naturalization" comes into being in the parents' lives. Here, ideals often become visible as norms around modern-day parenting, based in intensive parenting (Hays 1996) and paranoid parenting (Furedi 2008).

Emerging patterns of screen time negotiations

The parents in this study each have their own thoughts, values, intended practices and, to use Schütz's (1970) words, "scheme of reference" (1970:72) when it comes to screen time. Many notable patterns emerged from the material generated in

this dissertation. First, regardless of how the parents implicitly or explicitly defined their relationship with screen time, there were no misunderstandings between interviewer and interviewee when discussing the term. Screen time was universally understood as regulating, monitoring and ultimately controlling children's screen use in the household. While the parents were informed about the broader scope of the study, the way in which they almost reflexively interpreted the term screen time is notable and could be related to public discourses around the phenomenon. The screens already had a form of expressed "screenness" (Introna & llharco 2004), embodied with values simply by interacting with them. While the parents' interpretations of screen time is still a theme that is explored, the way in which parents negotiate the many practices and values around the concept is a more central theme. The reason this decision was made is because this approach not only answers the question of how, but also the question of why. When asked why she feels that screen time is an issue in her everyday life, Silje says, "I think it's because today… That it's so easily accessible and infinite. You have to limit it [screen time] yourself" (Silje, one child aged 3). On the other hand, these limitation practices are often put in place as, as Anna notes, "the routine itself should not create more stress" (Anna, one child aged 6). These examples serve as aspects or dimensions of 'why' the parents' screen time regulations are experienced as important. The infinite nature and accessibility of screen technologies demand management, which is expressed by both Silje and Anna. Stress is often linked to the way screen devices and practices permeate the everyday life of parents. I attempt to answer this question throughout this dissertation, though not always explicitly, and certainly not independently. The negotiations the parents exhibit through their interviews are often complex and sprawling, with several ideas often expressed in just a few sentences.

The second pattern that emerged in the interviews was that the way in which parents managed screen time within the confines of the household varied significantly. Instead of trying to present different interpretations of screen time in real-life situations (e.g., beyond institutional recommendations), this chapter embraces the sprawling, sometimes even contradictory negotiations that are constants in the parents' everyday lives. In an account of his and his family's daily routines, Martin explains why he and his partner extended their children's screen time from forty-five minutes to one hour. Martin, a father of three children aged four, eight and nine, shows how screen time is up for constant negotiation and adaptation, as are issues related to the phenomenon.

We thought it was reasonable, like on a regular weekday. How much? How much time should you spend? It's pretty… how many waking hours do you have, really? They have school and after-school care, they have homework, activities. How much time is reasonable to spend on screens? Because they can sit for eight hours straight if you give them free rein. It feels like… well, it varies. But they can also just dive into a game and play for hours if they're given free play. So I think we just decided that. We also have screen-free days. (Martin)

The very "nature" of screen time as it appears between researcher and participant, is summarized here in a few lines of dialogue in order to be evaluated, negotiated, monitored and regulated. The "screenness" is not primarily expressed in terms of specific uses or content; rather, it is simply in the children's interactions with screens, regardless of what is done. These notions appear in all of the parents' accounts in this study but in different ways. What unites the parents' accounts is the understanding of screen time as something to be acted upon – often regulated or monitored. Screen time, as will be discussed, is a certain type of time, activity and negotiation on and around screens that is not always clearly defined. What is evident though, is that the parents often see this as "the modern issue" (Frank, one child aged 6), as Frank puts it.

Even though the concept of screen time is understood by all parents in this study as children's time spent on screens, often in a controlled and regulated manner, the ways they individually experience it in their daily lives are complex. While everyday life with, through and around screen devices is now a facet of modern (Western) life, media use is neither invisible nor separate from mundane daily on-goings. Both technologies and uses are part of multiple complex negotiations, where the home is a central site where "technology's potential is debated, contested and agreed upon" (Chambers 2016:13). This perspective emphasizes the values, ideals and uses that surround media technologies and their uses, which form a large part of the investigation in this chapter. This emphasis is in part an attempt to explore a "shared cognitive schema that represents the system of meanings that govern a given social structure" (Chambers 2016:14). While focus lies on subjective experience, the parents presented here all imagine screen time in specific ways, either linking it to stress and regulation or as a source of uncertain outcomes or infinite and often uncontrollable streams of content. These "shared cognitive schemas" form part of the parents' experiences within the intersubjective life-world, which makes the paramount to investigate.

It's just part of our lives:
Everyday attention and inattention

Screen time is part of a certain kind of shared cultural understanding, both by definition and in our everyday practices. As an arena, the everyday is where these activities take place and values are established. The parents in the present study act in their life-world, a space of familiarity and coherence (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). However, this everyday is articulated differently among the parents.

> I usually don't think about how that kind of technology [smart phones and tablets] is becoming part of me or how it [intelligible], it just happens. It's part of our lives. (Max, two children aged 11 and 13)

The following anecdote is from Max, a father of two children aged eleven and thirteen. Max is one of the few fathers I interviewed on their own, a PhD student who lives with his partner in southern Sweden. Sitting across from him, the table in front of us contains his smart phone and my own, along with a simple recorder, red light flashing indicating that it is recording our conversation. Max is discussing his family's habits when using media technology, addressing, among other things, the multiple purposes of the smart phone he just bought his thirteen-year-old son. In this discussion, Max acknowledges that screen time and media use in the family is something integrated and at times almost invisible, while still being a substantial part of daily life. Max continues to emphasize that even if his family's everyday life is dependent on screen use, these technologies do not come without their problems and struggles. Screen time means many different things to Max – sometimes it functions as a way to provide some relief on weekend mornings, when the children wake up early. He and his wife simply want to sleep a little longer (many of the parents report this kind of weekend routine). Screen time then functions as a temporal delay, a "quantity time" (see Christensen 2002), passing the time until the "real" weekend time begins. Other times, Max admits to feeling frustrated over the use of media as a social barrier, as his daughter has trouble making friends at school, and instead turns to online gaming. In this respect, Max is relatively ambivalent about his family's media use, stating that "technology is doing this and doing the opposite at the same time, and I'm not sure what to make of it" (Max). The life-world, though wholly recognizable and coherent, is not without contradictions.

The use of media has become something that many of the parents in this study express as an integrated part of everyday life, or as Max puts it, "it just happens." Still, all parents acknowledge that there are struggles and issues that arise from media use. Ylva, a mother of a seven-year-old, echoes Max's sentiments when she notes that "at the end of the day, screen time is complicated […] Our screens are part of daily life" (Ylva). According to Ylva, a single mother working as a preschool teacher, screen time and media use are constantly negotiated in everyday life and come with a specific set of challenges. She notes that her seven-year-old son has many interests, among them video production, which involves the use of screens. This echoes a common discourse that "oscillates between the young child as a great and creative consumer of media technology, and the capacity of the technologies to 'consume' the child" (Sandberg et al. 2021:61). Ylva notes that she feels the need to set limits and have a somewhat consistent approach to her son's screen time, something that is bound to her own interests: "I myself don't like games that much, for example, so I limit that part. But some people see games as something really creative" (Ylva). The life-world is subjectively experienced, but it is experienced within the intersubjective world (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). Ylva illustrates how her subjective experience is the basis of her screen time limits, at the same time relating to broader understandings of screen time in terms of how she imagines others perceive gaming.

As screens become an increasing part of her family's everyday life, Ylva notes that having any coherent rules "also becomes more and more fuzzy" (Ylva). The routinization work of establishing clear approaches is difficult, understanding Ylvas statement. Gerd, a teacher living in southern Sweden, explains that screen time is an inevitable part of her everyday life, stating: "I mean, I can't be over their shoulder all the time, checking: 'what are you doing now?'" (Gerd, two children aged 11 and 14). Being recently divorced, she feels she has received increased responsibility over her children's screen time. The everyday cannot become a site of constant surveillance; it needs to primarily be a site of simply living life as a family. Screen time practices are part of "family practices", as these "merge and overlap" (Morgan 2011:7), which all parents in some capacity illustrate throughout this dissertation. Gerd illustrates this through her decision not to use any technological solutions to limit her children's screen time, as her ideas of family life is not as a site of constant monitoring. She feels that screen time is also a time for her children to explore their own lives, their own interests. This is often how screen use and the practices around screen time are explained in the parents'

interviews, as part of simply living their lives. At the same time, all of the interviewed parents are well aware of the technologies and related practices surrounding them. As Gerd says, "it's all a bit unknown, I don't feel like I have total control over it" (Gerd). They analyze, reflect and articulate ideas, ideals and values based on their own and their family's daily use of media technology. Screen time, however fuzzy the phenomenon may appear, holds a special meaning that evokes ideals of management and regulation, even when used as temporal relief or a creative outlet. The meanings of screen time still need to be negotiated and related to, even if the phenomenon at time seems "natural."

While it may not always be completely clear how screen time should be defined, it is a phenomenon that entails special values and is also seen as a 'natural' occurrence, part of the routines in the parents' everyday life. The parents above seem to attempt to address what can be understood as the dual nature of screen time. Scannell (2017) discusses the very meaning of daily life as "an everyday world and an everyday thing means a world and its things that work every day" (2017:46). Screen time is such an everyday "thing", but it still invokes feelings in the parents that make them want to define and manage the phenomenon – to pin down its true meaning. A phenomenological investigation of such a world deals with the consequences of how individuals act in and "upon the world," as qualities or dimensions of the life-world (Schütz 1970:73). In many ways, the parents describe an everyday that appears normal to them, natural, a recognizable flow of things that "just happen." That does not mean that the world is unproblematic or uncontrollable, which the discussions around screen time show. In relation to technologies, screen use is 'naturalized' in the mundane everyday to the point that these technologies and their uses are part and parcel of daily activities (something that Couldry and Hepp (2016) conceptualize as "deep mediatization"). This routinization is brought up when the parents were asked to describe their typical weekday.

> We have dinner around quarter to six. And then… From around quarter to seven, we usually have a cozy evening on the couch, watching TV or using the tablet while having a small evening snack. And then, around quarter to eight, we go upstairs to brush our teeth and go to bed. (Märta, two children aged 4 and 7)

> [At night] we often sit together. We usually stream something, like Friends or something that everyone thinks is a bit funny to have in the background. (Lisa, two children aged 16 and 17)

114

[The child] wakes up, and we put on an audio book. Partly because we could both stay in bed before the rest of the family wakes up. […] And then, later in the morning, we [play] Nintendo together. (Olle, two children aged 2 and 5)

We go to school and work, and then we come home. We have a bit of time together, and then it's cooking and everything like that. And then my son has his screen time after dinner. It's about an hour, an hour and a half. (Ylva, one child aged 7)

This is how some of the parents describe their "typical Wednesday," which was my prompt in the interviews. Screen time is part of activities that are seemingly "trivial", creating everyday family life 'structures' as these practices are continuously, and routinely, 'done' (Morgan 2011:6). Märta, for example, in describing evening time with her two children of four and seven, positions media activities as a 'natural,' or at least established, part of her daily routines. These routines are not very different from eating dinner or going to bed. In the interview, Märta, who works as a lawyer in one of the larger cities in Sweden, continues to list the different media and technologies she associates with screen time, such as the TV and games on tablets and mobile phones. As Sandberg et al. (2021) note, media is "embedded in the incorporation of everyday routines in the households" (2021:74). While her children are too young to have their own mobile phones, they still have an ensemble of media uses, according to Märta. Not all activities are equal, however, as Märta notes: "I rather they watch normal children's programs […] I feel that they get much more hypnotized by watching YouTube" (Märta). She still considers these activities screen time, even if they require different levels of management. The family does not have strict rules; rather, they use "common sense and what works for […] the family" (Märta). This means that some screen activities are seen as more problematic than others. Problematic uses often require more restriction, while those deemed less problematic by Märta fit easier into the 'natural' flow of everyday life. This is the case for all the parents in the above examples, as screen time has become a routinized media practice (see Bausinger for an early illustration of this routinization; 1984).

Many objects in everyday life, such as clothing and furniture "accommodate us: most of the time they receive our 'daily inattention'" (Highmore 2011:58). The types of technological devices the parents discuss are, at times, objects that have our full attention, but at other times, they have what Highmore terms our

'inattention.' In this digital age, screen activities are "something you just [do] without giving it much thought" (Markham 2017:3). Many activities are just performed without being "given much thought," they are part of the 'natural attitude,' the taken-for-grantedness of the life-world (Schütz 1970). The way the parents describe their routinized world with screens illustrate these terms – taken-for-granted. While screen time as a phenomenon and activity certainly presents challenges; screen time is interwoven with the mundane daily on-goings of family life, such as waking up, socializing or alone time. They experience screen time in a seemingly natural and consistent way. The life-world is, in essence, this lived coherence – it comes across as unquestionable in its consistency (Schütz 1970). The way in which objects and activities, in this case those related to screens, are 'naturalized' in daily life is not a revolutionary argument in any way (think about the TV's 'natural' placement in the living room, which has a long historical tradition). However, the negotiations around what screen time means and how it is perceived in everyday life are crucial to experiencing screen time as a perceived 'natural' part of daily life. A certain amount of consistency makes screen time a taken-for-granted element of daily life.

Märta provides one example of the many negotiations that relate screen time to other, seemingly mundane, routines and practices in her family's domestic life:

> Same thing with… it's not often we have lördagsgodis [Saturday candy], but we're pretty relaxed about giving ice cream and… well, all those kinds of things. Just trying things, 'Sometimes you get it, and sometimes you don't get that, and sometimes you don't get that.' But yeah, we're probably just relaxed about it. […] It's just a natural part of life, like everything else. You eat your food, and you can watch TV sometimes, and sometimes you don't watch TV. (Märta, two children aged 4 and 7)

To speak of objects as not being given attention, as Highmore (2011) suggests much of what we encounter daily can be categorized, is in this case two-fold; objects are all around us, while at the same time "invisible". Märta explains her thoughts regarding screen time in terms of metaphors related to other things that are often seen as in need of regulation, in her case "lördagsgodis" (weekend-only candy). Screen-clad objects are, in her line of thinking, in need of a specific type of attention that simultaneously renders them not in need of attention, thereby 'neutralizing' the screen objects and practices. This presents an ideal that is quite contradictory to what Hays (1996) describes as "intensive parenting". Even though

Märta refers to discourses around candy and child health, she does so to signify that these practices should be met with a more relaxed approach. She aims to "play down and neutralize" (Märta) the activity of screen time. This signals an ideal that seems to resist the norms of intensive parenting, where trust becomes a factor in retaining a coherent and manageable everyday. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) have also noted this in their research, where parents, in regards to media technology use in the family, can form alternative or resistant "parenting philosophies" to the dominating ideals (2020:176). However, Märta still negotiates these values against the backdrop of intensive parenting. She notes that this trust and respect are not always there, but that would be her utopia. This line of thinking demands a certain ideal of "closeness" (Nelson 2011) between parent and child, which is part of middle-class parenting values. "Playing down" screen time activities demands more resources in terms of time investment and involvement. While the ideals expressed by Märta seemingly resist the ideals of intensive parenting, the emotional and social resources needed for this are immense. This means that the ideology of intensive parenting is still a prominent presence.

While the life-world is very much taken for granted, it is still at times "incoherent," "only partially clear" and "not at all free from contradictions" (Schütz 1970:75). This can be seen in all of the parents' accounts so far in this chapter. In relation to screen time, the parents noted ambivalence, contradictions and incoherence as dimensions of their family lives. Screen time seems to be a contradictory phenomenon, embodying several dualities. The nature of Märta's account makes this clear. To make these objects a natural and "undramatic" part of daily life, they are in need of a specific kind of attention, even though Märta admits that this attention is not always up to par and at times can be categorized as "lazy."

Märta is, of course, aware of the objects as technologies; however, her experiences relate to the everyday practices around these objects. Practices are therefore more pronounced in her statements. It is also evident that she understands the screen practices within her everyday as more central than the object itself. This signifies an attempt to incorporate the phenomenon of screen time as a natural part of her daily life. This is true for all the parents' accounts so far. Seldom do the parents refer to a specific technology when talking about screen time, which can of course also be contributed to the abstraction of the term. Instead, the actual activity or the content consumed are experienced as "an everyday thing" (Scannell 2017:47). The activities and content are, however, tied to the material object – they are not

inseparable. Another dimension that can be understood from the participants' accounts is that the values, ideals and everyday actions transcend the object itself. Screen time as a phenomenon is less about the actual technology and more about what kind of experiences it elicits. As Märta puts it: "The tablet or the TV are toys like many others and should be used with moderation and reason, and preferably with healthy things to watch on them" (Märta). Once again, Märta seems to describe a utopian situation, grounded in the knowledge of what she perceives as "sound" or its opposite.

When asked about screen time, Ester, a young single mother of an eight-year-old daughter, puts it similarly when discussing how she tries to 'neutralize' screen devices and their content in her daily life.

> We talk quite a lot about… You don't want to scare them either, because it's also a part of our life today. It's going to be there. So, I don't want to create fear that the internet is dangerous, because it's not. It's a huge asset. But you have to be careful with it. (Ester, one child aged 8)

Ester, who lives in southern Sweden working at a care home, acknowledges the duality of screen time in her daily life as something to be careful of, but not something that needs to be feared. In her words, screen use is sometimes a great asset. What Ester seems to be doing is negotiating another duality of screen time – a phenomenon that is a constant recurring activity in the mundane, while at the same time is generally perceived as harmful. While this negotiation seems rational, Ester continues to state that in order to establish this balance, "lots of trust" (Ester) is needed. Her child also needs to be active and avoid misusing the screen, and as there is a need for mutual engagement between her and her child. Simply put, they both need to trust each other, as Ester states. Screen time, however much a part of the mundane, requires this kind of involvement from Ester. Her oscillation between attention and inattention is a strategy to protect her daughter, acknowledging the taken-for-granted dimensions of screen time and the perceived harms that could occur. Other parents formulate it, for example, as: "Like getting it [screen time] into the everyday in a more everyday way" (Anna, one child aged 6), signaling active processes of routinization. Märta states that the everyday in regard to screen time is having "moderate pieces of all parts in life, in some ways" (Märta). Deciding not to restrict screen time is in itself a practice of regulation, relying on forms of self-regulation, routinization and trust.

Understanding children's experience

Gerd explains her reasoning around screen time as part of her everyday life: "It won't go back like. It won't. That's the way it is, and one just needs to adapt I guess" (Gerd, two children aged 11 and 14). Getting used to screen time demands adaptation, which is similar to the argument from Märta in the previous section. Screen time is seen as a constant phenomenon in their life-worlds. "Not scaring her child" or "getting used to the situation" can both be understood as strategies to avoid making screen time something extraordinary, as the extraordinary very much demands attention. While not articulated in the exact same way, Beata, a mother of two children aged eight and eleven, expresses a similar sentiment towards what she refers to as "screen time with responsibility":

> As long as it works with personal responsibility and you constantly keep an open dialogue and question things, asking the kids to question things too, I think then you just go with it. It's something that's here and will continue to be and maybe develop even more. So then it's better to learn to handle it, and I think you don't do that by forbidding it. (Beata, two children aged 8 and 11)

Both mothers recognize screen time as "part of our life today" and do not want screens and their content to be something that becomes 'scary or 'forbidden,' which they believe could happen with too many restrictions or reprimands. These positions seem to oscillate between viewing screen time as an activity that requires attention or inattention. For the two mothers, it seems that the acceptance of screens as part of the digital age is crucial in learning how to manage the screen time phenomenon. Inattention is the activity linked to the taken-for-granted essence of everyday life (Highmore 2011). To manage screen time as a feature of modern life, and imagined future(s), there needs to be both attention and inattention. Management consists of both these features and activities.

Beata, a student who has recently returned to university to finish her studies, also emphasizes the importance of the children's questioning. The children are not only another dimension of the life-world; they are part of the intersubjective nature of the life-world, where the world individuals inhabit is a shared one. Recognizing, interacting with and understanding others is a feature of an individual's experience, not a separate dimension (Schütz 1970). While the ideal is that of inattention – of naturalizing screen time – the participants note the importance of this intersubjective perspective. The parents here discuss this in

terms of being open and having an open dialogue around screen use and content, as well as making screen time part of the everyday. Beata exclaims that she feels it is important for "the kids to question things too." Paradoxically, this inattention is also a form of attention. To be able to "just go with it," the parents need to be reflexive, questioning and analyzing the practices around screen time. The state of inattention is not just achieved naturally but requires work. This can also be part of avoiding conflict, as Martin, who works as a project planner in one of the larger Swedish cities, states: "I don't want to enter a conflict just because you're [the child] not done with you game and want another five minutes of play. Ok, fine, that's ok." (Martin, three children aged 4, 8 and 11). In Martin's account, the child's experience is placed front and center, even if he feels that it is still necessary to restrict his child's screen time. As Morgan (2011) notes, everyday practices *become* family practices as they reference other members of the family. Again, screen time practices and family practices here constitute an overlap, uncovering some of the ways in which Martin makes sense of his everyday family life.

Even if the parents strive for an inattentive state around screen time, which would involve close to no conflict, the work involved in getting there are practices of attention. These statements become testaments to how screen regulation, and the ideas behind the practice, are negotiated from one parent to the next. Olof, father of a three-year-old, explains why he feels it is important to attempt to make screen time an everyday activity:

> The atmosphere at home is better if the parents are free of anxiety. But if it becomes an anxiety thing, like, you have to watch as little as possible, and it's constantly there during the day—watch as little as possible, watch as little as possible—then it's not very pleasant. (Olof, one child aged 3)

Olof, who is self-employed and works mostly from home, feels it would create anxiety to constantly bring attention to his child's screen time practices, instead aiming for some kind of happy medium. The alternative, as he sees it, is being able to live with screen time without constant attention, and this, he feels, creates a more pleasant atmosphere in the household. Interviewed together, Silje, who works as a nurse and is Olof's partner, adds that for her, screens (as well as children's eating habits) have been "very loaded" subjects. As she says, "everything is supposed to be so perfect, or that's what society has imprinted on me" (Silje). The parents feel pressure to create an anxiety-free environment for their children

when it comes to screen time but also note that this standard is very hard to achieve. Practices are directed at making this family 'structure', built on their expressed ideals (see Morgan 2011), anxiety-free. Once again, a state of inattention seems to require daunting undertakings. Both Olof and Silje question the expert advice they have been given from BVC (the child healthcare center), which states that toddlers should have no screen time at all. Olof and Silje resist this recommendation, stating that they do not believe that it is based on "current research." This lack of confidence in – and questioning of – experts and policy makers is a marker for what Furedi (2008) dubs "paranoid parenting." For Furedi, this is a cultural phenomenon in modern (Western) societies, where discourses of worry and insecurities around the development of children and practices of child-rearing have become dominant (Furedi 2008). Through their statements, the parents can be understood as reproducing these discourses. This is visible both in terms of their resistance to expert advice and their understanding of child-rearing, as expressed through the notion that this advice is supposed to be "perfect." Paradoxically, Silje still feels pressure to live up to the impossible standards she seems to resist, as she stresses the importance of managing screen time in the everyday.

There is a difference between the phenomenological "lived-experience," which is simply a constant stream of experiences, and the "active dimension of life" (Barabas 2012:99). An active dimension of living requires attention and active engagement, while other parts of living can be defined as intuitive or "just living." The parents often oscillate between these two dimensions; in many cases, screens and screen time is just another lived-experience, remaining within the flow of the life-world. Other times, it needs special attention – an activeness to create an everyday that is "meaningful in the explicative acts of my consciousness" (Schütz & Luckmann 1973:15). A sense of meaningfulness, which one can think of as a dimension of purpose, is paramount in understanding the parents' negotiations and practices around screen time. What the parents strive for is a coherent and distinguishable everyday in which they can be "wide-awake" (Schütz & Luckmann 1973) in their actions towards their children and screen time. One part of this is recognizing the children's own experience with screens and screen use. Svante, a project manager in infrastructure, notes this as he describes his two-year-old son's interactions with screens: "We also believe that he also thinks it's a great time when he's on his tablet" (Svante, two children aged 3 months and 2 years). Screen time is not only a source of pressure, constant negotiations and

potential harms. By striving to understand his child's perspective, Svante also recognizes that for his son, it is ultimately an enjoyable experience. Ester describes the value of screen time for her daughter by stating, "If something is very important, then it's also important in your world, even if I don't understand it" (Ester, one child aged 8). The parents' attempts to understand how their children themselves experience time spent with screens become a crucial part of the negotiations around screen time.

Silje, who previously acknowledged her mistrust of experts around screen time, notes how screen time is a source of enjoyment for her son: "He gets so happy. So, he should also be allowed to take part in life" (Silje, one child aged 3). To Silje, screen time is a part of life; it is expressed as a routinized and ordinary activity. Silje also discusses that she "feels that I want to be the one who gives him these things," referencing enjoyable experiences on screens. As many parenting researchers have pointed out, contemporary views on parenting are characterized by demands for a high degree of emotional engagement (see Dermott & Fowler 2023), which becomes visible in these arguments. At the same time, Silje admits to also being restrictive towards screen time, noting that her ideal is "close to zero." Screen time is once again portrayed as a paradoxical phenomenon based on contradictory norms. Restriction and enjoyment are two sides of the duality. Silje can be understood as juxtaposing the fundamentality of her child's experience (see Hays 1996) with her own insecurities about what unrestricted screen time may mean in terms of well-being (see Furedi 2008). Silje feels that she wants to be the one to provide these enjoyable experiences for her son, seeing this as a way to be a 'good' parent. Consequently, she emphasizes how paradoxical parenting can be in the digital age. Ideals and actual practices come under scrutiny here, as allowing or restricting screen time comes down to both the child's own experience (as experienced by Silje) and experienced norms around screen time and modern-day parenting. These norms are expressed as what "parents should provide" (Dermott & Fowler 2023) in today's digital society, ideals that comes through in Silje's statements.

The pressure the parents feel around screen time is linked to daily attention. As discussed previously in this chapter, practices around screens are central to this daily attention. Gerd declares that she does not employ strict regulations around screen time for her eleven- and fourteen-year-old children, as "it feels a bit tedious to do so" (Gerd, two children aged 11 and 14). Her experience of her children's screen time is that of alone time, a time of winding down or being allowed to be

by yourself. However, Gerd emphasizes that she wants her children to have experiences away from screens, for example, reading books, as part of their alone time. The children's practices become central to Gerd's need for management around screen time.

> I would say screen time is one thing. We probably talk more about what it is that you're watching on the screen. That's probably the kind of restrictions we have. And then, of course, we try not to watch too often. I don't think you can sit for three to four hours straight and just watch. But as I said, if you're watching a movie, then it's about an hour, an hour and a half. (Idun, two children aged 6 months and 4)

Idun, who works at an advertising agency in southern Sweden, states that she is not happy with her children watching too many modern children's programs. She tries to manage this by introducing older programs and movies, especially those to which she herself has emotional ties. Idun also connects screen time to sitting still, while playing dance videos, which her four-year-old imitates, is considered much more appropriate. These negotiations are based on what is seen as excessive and bad screen time. Long sessions in front of screens are almost exclusively seen as negative. Gerd, in her interview, admits to being "somewhat of a dinosaur," as she values screens differently than, for example, books. Idun, sharing a similar sentiment, sees dancing or older children's television programs as a better option than modern programs. This implies that screen time must be monitored to make sure that the child does not over-consume the 'wrong' thing. Screen time can be considered alone time, however, this alone time must be surveilled and managed by the parent.

An excessive amount of screen time can easily be understood as wasteful by the parents, in danger of becoming simply "quantity time" (see Christensen 2002). Alone time is then both centered on the child's experience and the ideals of parenting and screen time. Screen time is still perceived as in need of management for both Gerd and Idun but can provide spaces that are important to their children. This is expressed by Gerd as something almost necessary: "Sometimes it's just so darn good to just be able to do that [sit with screens] […] Sometimes it can feel like a break and that we all need it" (Gerd). However, Gerd notes the ambivalence in this statement, continuing by saying, "Although I know all the research says the opposite, and I just get stressed out from all this I see" (Gerd). The child-rearing around screen time becomes a space of ambivalence. With

respect to the experiences of their children, both Gerd and Idun are required to be attentive (to regulate and manage) and inattentive (allow for alone time). This is in many ways the nature of the intersubjectiveness of the life-world – the consideration and interaction of other individuals in which we share the world.

Media technology fills many different roles in everyday life (and sometimes seemingly no role at all). Similar to Highmores (2011) example of a chair in which to rest the body, the screen is a place to rest the mind. At the same time, it is linked to feelings of stress, of "something ugly," which at times needs extensive management so it does not consume the children's lives. The ambivalent feelings of restfulness and stress that Gerd expresses are related to one and the same activity. The same kinds of objects and their uses, to use a phenomenological term, are being *intended* (see Schütz 1970; Husserl 1995), but the intention differs under different circumstances. A screen attains meaning through the way it is intended. In the absence of such an intention, screen devices are just different sized black shapes – composed of electronic components, metal and glass – used for activities that are meaningless acts. Media use, in terms of screen time, thus becomes a meaningful activity when it is indeed intended. When asked what constitutes screen time, Frida, a mother of three (aged between six and eleven), explains these activities and how she envisions different types of screen use.

> I think it's different to sit with a phone or a tablet so close to your face where they're more in their own little world, compared to watching TV together where you sit farther away and talk in a different way. And video games are yet another thing, because then they're socializing with each other while playing. So it's a bit more social, and they can almost play while gaming, so to speak. (Frida, three children aged 6, 9 and 11)

According to Frida, who works as a nurse, all of the above examples are still screen time, as she includes them in the one and a half hours her three children of six, nine and eleven are allowed on weekdays. What Frida elaborates on is, in part, the ensemble of devices in the home as technological objects (the TV, mobile phone and tablet), but more importantly, how these objects are used and their social implications. All this is done with the well-being of her children solidly in mind, which a remains paramount outset. Sociality becomes central to her negotiations around her children's screen time. As Frida notes, they are "almost" playing while interacting with digital games, distinguishing between the child's play and gaming. To Frida, there is a division between play and screen time, where play is

a social activity and screen time is not (or just barely). Ideals around children's play, mental health, appropriate screen use and healthy social interactions are all inter-linked and reproduced through Frida's statement. Frida exhibits how insecurities around her children's well-being become central to her parental negotiations (see Furedi 2008), exhibited as value-based ideas (what constitutes play and what does not). The expressions of these values are processes of negotiations – both internal and subjective – but also parts of broader meanings of screen time and 'proper' parenting.

The way these ideas and practices around screen time are imagined by Frida demonstrates the how screen time can attain different meanings and moral connotations, depending on context. To be "in one's own world" is not as desirable to Frida as other activities, which to her are "more social," "almost like playing." Certain activities are "better" (both on screen and without the screen), which many of the parents allude to. Britta, a researcher at one of the larger universities in Sweden, notes that she wants her children, aged two and four, to have "a social life" which, to her, involves restricting screen time as it can "devour a large chunk of your free time" (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4). Astrid, an arts teacher with three teenagers, expresses how her son wanted to "fill his time" with screens, while she tried her best to make him choose other activities that are not so "easily accessible" (Astrid, three children aged 15, 16 and 18). This illustrates how screen time presents an ensemble of practices and meanings that is positioned against other activities in the domestic space, especially when it comes to how the parents imagine their children's experiences. Ideals and actual experience become two sides of the same phenomenon. Ylva further elaborates on how her child's screen time can, in the same moment, consist of differing meanings.

> And I think that even if we're sitting with our own screens, being close still creates a sense of togetherness. And I also think that he wants—he wants to show me what he's doing. […] He wants me to be part of what he's doing on the screen as well. (Ylva, one child aged 7)

Ylva acknowledges the importance of how her child experiences screen time. She believes this is a social activity for her child, noting that he wants her to participate in his activities on the screen. Ylva admits that being involved in her child's screen activities has also changed her own management practices around screen time. Quality time becomes differentiated from quantity time (Christensen 2002), as

togetherness and participation between parent and child is 'better' screen time. Screen time not only elicits feelings of being "in your own world," but can be a more involved activity. Learning about creative games, such as *Minecraft*, allowed for another kind of understanding of her child's screen use. Going from, as she herself expresses, "being very critical towards screens" to understanding the experiences of her child also affects her view of screen time in her life-world. The boundaries of screen time become fluid and prone to changes, as notions of quality and quantity time. Screen time is then often conceptualized as one general activity in current discourses (Lafton et al. 2023). However, as the participants express, screen time is a plethora of practices, norms and ideals. The complexity of screen time presents many challenges, as Mimmi, an economist living in one of the largest Swedish cities, states:

> Because there are so many things that are incredibly fun and can be inspiring, you know. But I absolutely don't feel like I have control over it. It's this huge… an enormous world with so much god-damned stuff, just so much. (Mimmi, three children aged 13, 15 and 17)

For Mimmi, navigating this world is difficult, and the plethora of content is nearly impossible to keep track of with three teenagers. She feels that she does not have a good grasp on what her children actually do as "they sit with their screens alone." As the children in her family are all teenagers, she feels they have something in common, while she is often excluded. This presents a weaker level of the parent-child "closeness," as Nelson (2010) discusses. Screen time becomes a boundary between parent and child, and while Mimmi has imposed rules in the past (when she was still living with er ex-husband), this has changed. She expresses her rationale around her children's screen time as: "It's reasonable to have one's own worlds in some ways, that I don't have a finger in everything they do" (Interview 20, Mimmi). The intersubjective nature of the life-world presents itself as respect towards others' experiences, others' "worlds." During the life course, the notion of children having their own world changes and evolves. As the parents here have shown, managing and understanding their children's experiences of screen time can take many forms. Surveillance and privacy, for example, play a large role for Mimmi, who strives to create a domestic everyday that functions well for her whole family. The remaining section of this chapter will further elaborate on this through more specific contexts from within the parents' experiences, which are rooted in the notion that screen time is a problem that needs a solution.

Making screen time work

Many of the parents interviewed for this dissertation have expressed worries about screens and screen time in their daily lives. Some articulate these worries as a fear that screens, in certain ways, colonize or consume the everyday, taking time away from other activities or leading to saturation. In this way, screen time is seen as problematic, which becomes apparent in many of the parents' statements. This is expressed in interviews with Ylva and Martin:

> In general, I think screens are pretty troublesome. I feel like it causes arguments, and I can see with my own son that when he [uses screens] a lot, then that's the only thing he finds fun. (Ylva, one child aged 7)

> But it's more like screens are everywhere anyway. They use computers at school, watch movies and all sorts of things. And that's how society is; screens are everywhere. At home, it's more like… You don't need to have even more of it there all the time. (Martin, three children aged 4, 8 and 11)

These ways of thinking provide a backdrop and "frameworks of knowledge" (Chambers 2016:14) that the parents draw upon in their negotiations around screen time in the home. The two statements above are telling in the way they are expressed by the two parents. They both reflect and comment on home life, expressing concern that too much time is spent on screens. However, their reasoning is very different. Ylva's reasoning is very personal, where the child is perceived as unresponsive while on the screen. Martin puts his reasoning into a larger societal perspective, where he feels screens are overtaking daily life and that the household needs to be restrictive to counterbalance this. While everyday family life is in certain ways fluid, the home is a significant space for family practices (Morgan 2011). The two parents imagine screen time as easily becoming "too much," crossing the boundaries of what is perceived as reasonable. The ways in which the parents formulate their perceptions of family life with screens addresses the impact these specific practices have on social life, evoking certain ideals and norms. Excess, saturation, control, regulation and restriction become part and parcel of the experience of screen time, as many parents in this study describe it, however different their actual personal experiences might be.

The statements presented here show how the parents situate their concerns as troubles, and not problems, as they "occur within the character of the individual

and within the range of his [sic] immediate relations with others" (Mills 1959:8). An aspect of troubles is that the "statement and resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu" (Mills 1959:8). The parents often relate to their troubles as part of their own responsibility within their "immediate milieu." As has been discussed in previous sections in this chapter, the parents relate these troubles to both their actual experience and the ideals they perceive as embodied by screen time practices. On a Zoom call, Anna, who works in regional development, illustrates this sense of responsibility when asked about her perceived issues with screen time.

> We notice ourselves that if there's been a period where he's spent a lot of time on screens, we notice that he has a harder time playing by himself. At one point, the amount of screen time became too much, and we said, 'Now we're cutting it off completely.' There were arguments every time about the screen. So we said, 'Now we're taking a screen break.' And then we noticed how he started playing in a completely different way. We're not fundamentally interested in forbidding anything, but rather that it needs to be balanced. Because screens are part of his everyday life. (Anna, one child aged 6)

Responsibility is thus another form of attention given to screens in everyday life. Anna notes how certain social abilities (e.g., playing) are harmed by using the screen and recognizes that a break is needed. Her experience of her child's screen use leads her to specific types of actions and attention. Everyday experiences in the life-world also create expectations towards future, similar experiences (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). The perception that screen use is excessive is not only "determined," in this sense; it is also in the absence of the screen (when the child plays more) that this experience is further reinforced. Anna is, as has been noted earlier in this chapter, striving for balance in her family's daily life, which is a goal shared by all of the parents I have interviewed. This may not be surprising, as the notion of balance connotes coherence and a "naturally" flowing everyday. The determinedness of objects of experience is not always clear-cut. Mimmi, who was quoted at end of the previous section, explains that the troubles are not only a matter of children spending too much time on screens. It is also the way in which a problem sometimes necessitates other alternatives to screen time.

> It's not about forbidding it, it's about offering alternatives, like another fun activity that's enjoyable. […] I don't think—or, I haven't done it—but it's just that you

go around nagging at them to put it away, and then they're supposed to figure out what to do on their own. And that's how it is. In a way, I think it's reasonable. Why should I have to entertain you? My job is to make sure you're simply standing, walking and alive. (Mimmi, three children aged 13, 15 and 17)

In order to establish a functioning everyday for her family, Mimmi finds that the balance between allowing her children to solve their own problems and her responsibility to intervene is sometimes difficult to maintain. The problems around screen time are not only based on direct conflict of restriction or regulation, they are also present in the negotiations of parents in how they approach the problem. Mimmi refers to her role as a parent in her discussion on the problem of excessive screen use and distills it to making sure her children "stand and walk and live" – the very basics of survival. This is in many ways counter to the ideals of intensive parenting, which focus is on heavy parental involvement and emotional investment, "far more than minimal physical care" (Hays 1996:13). Mimmi also connects this to her own childhood, where she affirms that no one "made sure I was entertained around the clock." Her experience of her own childhood relates to her present arguments, noting her basic responsibilities as a parent should be considered most important.

The way in which Mimmi discusses this flow in her daily life highlights her children's independence and trust between parent and child as a means of limiting screen time. Parenting around screens and digital content is of a "dynamic nature" (Willett & Wheeler 2021:724), as demonstrated in Mimmi's reflexive statement. She moves between offering alternatives to screen time, to nagging her children, to a sense of resignation. Other alternative activities create balance, even though she does not feel it is her job to "entertain" her children. Taking on a distinctive role as a parent draws on her subjective experiences of parenting, and in turn, these parenting skills are put into action. Siv and Anders refer to this way of navigating the everyday as "being able to guide" your children regarding screen time, not constantly monitoring and regulating:

Siv: But maybe you don't need to—or maybe you should guide more when he's watching. […] As a parent, good parenting is about being able to guide. But also to challenge. […] And at the same time, create a safe environment, of course.

Anders: Yes, but there's a balance to it, right? (Siv & Anders, two children aged 6 months and 5 years)

Guiding and challenging becomes a balancing act for the two parents. As Siv, a nurse, notes, creating a safe environment is paramount. Anders, who works as a translator, notes they always sit with their children to select the content on the screen, which gives them control over what is consumed. However, as Siv says, they do not want to be "like hawks", circling the children every time they use the screen. How the parents imagine what 'good' parenting denotes a sense of "primary responsibility," which is a common discourse in modern-day policies (Dermott & Fowler 2023:605). This responsibility is seen in how the parents negotiate the "balancing act", while still feeling they are wholly accountable for creating a "safe space." The parenting that is imagined around screen time quickly becomes complex, as the parents here note that it involves equal measures of protection, challenge and guidance. Ideals around screen time are not a separate notion of parenting – the phenomenon embodies norms around parenting in itself.

Even though Moores (2017) discusses more tactile phenomenological interactions with his laptop when noting that these interactions are "familiar spaces of movement" (2017:64), what the parents here use in this "movement" through everyday life is indeed based on the familiar. The familiar can, however, quickly become unfamiliar.

> It's a fairly unexplored area as a parent, but you have to handle it yourself. No one is going to come along and… There's no authority saying, 'Hey, this is how to handle screen time with your kids,' so you have to figure it out yourself. And then you don't know. Maybe the best solution is to give them free time and opportunities, because that's what life will look like. Or maybe it should be limited. No idea. And you have to live with that uncertainty somehow. But with that comes the moral aspects too. I think it's a bit tricky to figure out. That said, I think we're pretty confident in the structures we've created because they've worked. (Martin, three children aged 4, 8 and 11)

Making screen time work means addressing the unfamiliar, be that a conflict or a more general feeling of unease and uncertainty. While Martin notes that he feels "secure" with the way he and his wife have been handling screen time, moving through the unfamiliar is a process that demands attention. Martin's ideas and subsequent practices are not routinely rational, he "just do[es] them and live[s] them" (Morgan 2011:5). In Martin's own words, this type of attention is dedicated to finding one's own way of handling screen time, as well as creating

the everyday family life "structures that work" for him (and his family). Living with screens and screen time is here imagined as a common issue, while the solution to the subjective problem is "to find your own way" of dealing with the problem.

Ideals and activities are not separable; they are at times contradictory, at times cohesive. In a sense, there are several dimensions of understanding at work here, showing how, in essence, how complex and interconnected the themes and perspectives in this dissertation are. As an initial presentation, this chapter has covered the ways in which parents imagine and negotiate the concept of screen time in their everyday lives. This dimension answers broader questions around screen time as a phenomenon that is part of the parents' life-world. However, the scope of this chapter is limited to what the parents in this particular study imagine as screen time, with its different ideals and connotations. The question that is partially answered here is: *How do the parents experience and negotiate the screen time phenomenon in their everyday lives?* – a question that remains a large part of this dissertation. Still, this question also produces knowledge around screen time and everyday life as a phenomenon in itself, contributing to a broader understanding of the screen time phenomenon.

Conclusion

This chapter has covered the experiences – both lived and imagined – that parents have when it comes to screen time. The initial mapping of how screen time is perceived provides many insights into the everyday life of parents and the phenomenon itself. While management and regulation are often at the forefront of the discussion, what regulation actually entails is what is explored here. Most of the parents seem to hold the view that while the phenomenon of screen time holds a special meaning in their everyday life, it is very much an integrated part of it. It is special; however, it is not extraordinary. It remains part of the mundane everyday that moves along as a series of known trajectories and routines. At the same time, screen time needs a special kind of attention and inattention, which is demonstrated through the parents' negotiations. Screen time can be experienced as many things, such as a distraction, an activity that provides relaxation and rest, a temporal relief or a creative outlet, still very much being part of the rituals and routines of everyday life. Screen time is also, often simultaneously, a site of resistance and acceptance of the norms that surround it. This makes the

phenomenon often a paradoxical one, as expressed by many of the parents. At the same time, these ideas around management are subjective in character, based on the parents' own intentions in relation to the phenomenon. As the parents' experiences vary (for example, some do not enjoy video games themselves), screen time approached with a certain intention. This intentionality is subjective, but the values that can be deduced from the parents' experiences make visible the reproduction of ideals and norms that are more generally recognizable.

The experiences of screen time that are conveyed by the parents also present certain dualities. While these qualities vary, and are at times paradoxical, these ideals and practices are all part of the parents' subjective, and intersubjective, "scheme[s] of reference" (Schütz 1970). On the one hand, screen use and screen time remain a constant, serving as ordinary and routinized acts such as eating dinner, playing outside or getting ready for bed. On the other hand, screen activities have attained a special status in the day-to-day in the digital age, as they often demand a certain level of attention, either in terms of regulation or negotiations around regulation (e.g., deciding when not to restrict). These negotiations are often of the same "type" even if their arguments vary. What is indicative of the way the parents negotiate the meaning of screen time is how their everyday consists of an ensemble of devices, practices and content that are not always easily separable from one another. These ensembles can often feel almost infinite in quantity (and quality). In the interviews, the parents negotiate the activities, the temporal aspects and the devices themselves and their meaning. However, emphasis is often placed on the very activity itself. As the dynamics of each family are different, so are the ways in which these negotiations appear. However, the way in which the ideas are put forward and related to other aspects of their daily lives often appear very similar. Screen time is a question of regulation; it includes a multitude of activities that are not at all valued equally. The same "type" of experience can look very different. It is a constant in daily life (problematic or not), and it can be experienced as both anti-social and social.

Screen time is an ensemble of meanings, ideals and practices pertaining to many different contexts. This relates to acknowledging children's own experiences and agency in these practices, as well as managing them in order to preserve their well-being. As Martin says: "[Parenting] to us is in large part about not creating conflicts and trying to have a good relationship with our kids" (Interview 21, Martin). The parents recognize that screen time connotes many different things,

and these activities are valued differently depending on context. These values do not exist independently from other norms and ideals around modern-day parenting. The parents also show that they are very attentive when it comes to screen time as a phenomenon in the life-world. They imagine screen time as something that demands a great deal of attention, whether through direct regulation or finding ways of "naturalizing" screen time in daily life. Screen time as a phenomenon is a large part of the parents' life-world in contemporary times. However, the way the parents negotiate their children's screen time as a component of their life-world oscillates between inattention and attention. Screen time becomes an everyday phenomenon, and as such, the technology is less visible, while practices instead take center stage. While the parents can naturally reflect on (and bring attention to) their values and practices, the media practices that is at the center of screen time remains in a constant stage of negotiation. When screen time *becomes* practices, both in the actual screen time and the regulation practices that surround it, attention becomes key in managing it.

5. Screen time, competence and doing parenthood

The previous chapter has explored the phenomenon of screen time as something intertwined, routinized and perceived as a consistent part of everyday life. The chapter dealt in part with practices around screen time. The present chapter is dedicated to further and more in-depth analysis of these screen time practices. Following Shove et al. (2012), this chapter is dedicated to developing an argument about parental competence and meaning, from which the parents draw ideas about their family's everyday screen time practices, which ultimately affect them. Practices here refers to an overarching understanding of how screen time is handled in the home, as well as what ideals these practices are based on. The way the parents reflect on these practices shows how they are valued and made meaningful in everyday life. These practices, however, do not exist purely in theory or independently. Practices are, in part, extensions of these ideals – realized in action. Morgan's (2011) notion of family practices will also be more pronounced here, where family is understood as being continuously done to constitute family-like "structures."[41] The intersubjective relationship that the parents experience within the family is the main focal point, connecting Giddens (1991) concept of reflexivity and practices as parts of a whole. Through reflexivity, the reasoning behind these practices can be unpacked, answering questions about how and why parents apply their management practices around screen time. This reflexivity and competence are based on their own past experiences, discourses of media as harmful, pressures of 'good' parenthood and the ways in which the child is imagined to be in need of protection. In some respects, this chapter will follow certain parents more closely, providing a more biographical leaning in the analysis.

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[41] This means that Morgan's original concept will at times be adapted to present parental practices, noting that parenting is something very specific and its ideals, norms and values are realized as it is done.

134

This to show how parents draw on competencies from many different aspects of their life-world, as well as their own upbringing.

What's fine and what's not: Management practices

This section will mainly look closer at parents with younger children, in this case between 0-11, a group whose worries, ideals and dedication to screen time management come through more strongly in the material. Naturally, the parents have many questions about child-rearing and doing things right when children are young. Ideals around paranoid parenting (Furedi 2008) then become more pronounced among these parents. As I started to ask general questions around their everyday media use, it did not take long for Silje to start describing her feelings towards screen time and how she values it:

> My goal is to have zero [screen time]… sometimes. I think media can be positive… sometimes… if I get to decide what he [my son] watches. He likes some children's programs that I think are poor quality, but I allow him to watch them sometimes. It's not harmful; it's just that I know there are better ones, ones I like. And they don't have to be ones I like, but it's of course a bit of the ones I watched in my own childhood. (Silje, one child aged 3)

By ascribing value not only to what is 'bad' or 'good' content, there is a clear focus on the amount of time that should be spent on screens and media technology. While Silje is hesitant to fully realize her goal of zero screen time, she is nonetheless expressing an ideal – although it seems nearly impossible, even to her. Silje is negotiating her parenting practices in terms of unattainable and ambivalent ideals, central to Furedi's (2008) notions of paranoid parenting. Silje describes a situation where the lines are not clearly drawn between when her child can watch what she continues to call "raucous" children's programs and when she can restrict her child to watching what she views as good children's programs. Silje's ideal situation, where her child would not have any screen time at all, intertwines with her notion of 'bad' content. She also draws on her own experiences from childhood to further explain her decisions on restricting her son's screen time. As an initial example, Silje draws on certain skills, anchored in subjective ideals and norms, to manage her child's screen time. These skills could be understood as competencies (Shove et al. 2012), which are dimensions of contextual knowledge that make up specific practices.

Other than competence, Shove et al. (2012) further define two elements when discussing their theories around practices, namely materials and meaning. While Shove et al. present a compelling examination of practices, their focus remains on the evolution of practices over time. The point is not to track practices longitudinally here, nor is that possible through single interviews. However, the elements that Shove et al. (2012) present provide a compelling approach to the empirical material, understanding practices as built on several dimensions. Screens or media technology, for example, are materials, which "encompass[es] objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and the body itself" (Shove et al. 2012:23). This includes not only screen technology but also content and infrastructures such as access to the internet, access to different streaming services and, in Silje's case, the ability to embody one's own restrictions. It is nonetheless the elements that Shove et al. label competence and meaning that will continue to have a special focus in this chapter.

While managing screen time calls for technological knowledge and subsequent practices, competencies are understood as "multiple forms of understanding and practical knowledgeability" (Shove et al. 2012:23). Ultimately, this extends much further than simple technological know-how. Competencies, as "forms of understanding," also relate to the ideas Silje has about parenthood and how to parent. Fully exploring in detail where all the parental references, norms, values and ideas come from does not seem fruitful when focusing on subjective experience. It is, however, important to acknowledge that the issues Silje discusses fall within her reflections on parenting as practice. Understood in this way, her ideas and practices can be seen as "reproducing the sets of relationships (structures, collectivities) within which these activities are carried out and from which they derive their meaning" (Morgan 2011:2). Silje is not only drawing from the competence of being a parent (and what a parent should be), she is also negotiating its meaning, in practice reproducing and upholding certain types of structures around parenting. She continues by noting that she is sensitive to noise in relation to children's programs, and after (rather unsuccessfully) trying to get her partner Olof to acknowledge that he is also sensitive to noise, states:

> Silje: Yes, I am [sensitive to sound], at least. So, I want soft voices, and then nice music and such. […] I really want him to get into music. I want him to be involved in good things.

Interviewer: Why do you think it's important?

Silje: Because I like it myself and have played music my whole life.

Olof: It's brought you a lot of joy.

Silje: Exactly, it's brought me joy! Not because it's better to do that, but I want to give him what I think is the best. So that he gets the opportunity to participate. To make music accessible. (Silje & Olof, one child aged 3)

Parenting can be seen as part of competencies in that it is a framework of ideals, creating an understanding of parental practices around screen time as meaning-making processes. Silje elaborates on more abstract ideas about what she values when letting her child watch children's programs. As their son is very young, at the time, three years old, the parents explain that it is easier to control his screen time by just changing the channel or simply turning off the screen. Still, they do not completely agree on all aspects of their son's screen use. This comes down to the fact that, as Silje explains, she and Olof "have had different childhoods," to which Olof exclaims: "It's often what you base it on, what you yourself grew up with" (Interview 2, 2021, Father). This shows how competence, as an element of practices, is both subjective and intersubjective. The parents build on their own subjective biographical experiences, which affect how they envision their parenting practices and ideals, something Morgan (2011) calls imaginary family practices. Competencies are then both constituted by ideals that are subjective (in the phenomenological sense) and expressed (through the parents) as more general norms around parenting.

In discussing the element of meaning, Shove et al. (2012) present an element of practices that "represent[s] the social and symbolic significance of participation" (2012:23). Meaning and competence are not autonomous, and in many cases, are not easily distinguishable from each other. Silje's references to music are very specific in terms of what she values in more general contexts around her child's screen use. Later in the interview, she mentions that these values are derived from her own parents, who thought 'good' music was an important aspect of life. Silje's present family practices are "shared and merged" (Morgan 2011:76) with the experiences and imaginaries of her own upbringing. She notes that this was an important part of her childhood, where she was frequently encouraged to learn and play music. The meaning that music has in these practices transcends the

actual significance of the children's program, constituting a core aspect of what Silje believes to be good parenting and parenting practices.[42] This comes down to her own cultural and social contexts, which are linked to perceived norms concerning what constitutes good music and what good parenting entails. Expressing the significance of "different tastes for culture" (Hovden & Rosenlund 2021), Silje links her tastes to culturally distinct social class contexts.

The notion of good music is not in any way universal; it is linked to specific ideals around what Silje feels should be passed on to her son. Olof, for example, understands this but does not acknowledge it as important to him. Instead, he tells me that he and his son will be able to bond over computer games when he gets older. This is also based on Olof's upbringing, as video games were a big part of his childhood. As he finishes his argument, Silje seemingly ascribes a lower value to this activity, noting that: "And we turned out to be normal humans despite that." Olof nods here, agreeing to this sentiment, even though he has downplayed the discourses of harm around video games. The juxtaposition of 'good' music as something related to 'good' taste, and video games related to something less 'tasteful,' shows how competencies are based on distinct norms.[43] This has an impact on Silje and Olof's everyday family practices, as promoting certain aspects of culture for their child are deemed 'better' than others. Both in the negotiations and the subsequent practices, Silje and Olof are reproducing what is culturally more, and less, acceptable and 'appropriate.' Through this, their parental competencies are shaped by specific internalized ideals and norms around taste and parenthood.

While Silje draws on individual experience and subjective competence, it is expressed in more general terms. Music is both a framework for defining 'good' or 'bad' content, as well as very specific ideals, which elicit certain practices (such as regulating screen time). What Silje believes is "the best" for her son is to be exposed to what she defines as good music. However, it is not clear what would she believes would happen if her son was exposed to bad content. When she then turns off the program, switches the channel or presents her son with shows that offer (what too her is) good music, these are practices based on her parental

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[42] The moral arguments around screen time will be further explored in chapter 6.

[43] Even though I do not directly reference Bourdieu (2010) here, his notion of taste and cultural capital is influential for many of the social class-based parenting studies referenced in this chapter.

competencies. In many ways, this is where parenting is "done" (Morgan 2011) – where meaning and competence form practices. Simply put, parenting ideals are embodied and made visible through practices. Screen time then becomes an example of the competencies Silje perceives as important in her child-rearing practices, as a feature of parenting in the digital age. Screen time poses diffuse threats that need to be mitigated or adapted through parental practices.

Meaning and competence are deeply interlinked in understanding specific practices. For Silje, competencies are drawn from a source of happiness and joy. While restriction is a practice associated with screen time, content with good music is encouraged.[44] She focuses on what is best for her son, although the potential consequences of failing in this regard are unclear. She then reveals uncertainty around her parenting practices, where good music is the 'antidote.' This uncertainty is part of the questioning of parenting practices and ideals in many contemporary cultures (see Furedi 2008; Van Den Berge 2013). Olof, who is more lenient towards screen time, acknowledges in the interview that this worry is in many ways good, because "it keeps him a bit in check" (Olof). The parents' ideals around parenting are also expressed though a common understanding that excessive screen time is generally undesirable. Competencies are, in turn, built on these expressed norms, which may explain why music could play an even bigger role in relation to screen time for Silje. Again, 'good' music becomes more important in the face of perceived bad content, as a practice to mitigate the imagined threats of screen use. To Silje, passing this on to her son is a responsibility and a meaningful practice. This also reproduces cultural taste as an important part of her son's upbringing, which is very much based on certain class-based norms.

During the interviews in this study, parents often use the same type of argumentation as Silje. Outside a larger town in southern Sweden, overlooking a grey garden, Kristina, self-employed in advertising, and Stefan, also self-employed, start discussing screen time in terms of content, and the negative aspects emerge almost instantly in their interview.

> Kristina: Yes, we have very, I don't know if it's good or bad, but we have very high standards for what he gets to watch. We don't want to show... It also feels like

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[44] The paradoxical and dual nature of screen time discussed in Chapter 4 is very much present in her reasoning.

part of the upbringing… from my family, at least. My dad always said, "Oh, this is too noisy, you're not allowed to watch this." And we're like that too. It can't be….

Stefan: No, but it can't be ugly either. We can't stand, for example… what's it called?

Kristina: *Paw Patrol*?

Stefan: Yes, we can't stand *Paw Patrol* because it's ugly. Just how it looks. Then we watched a bit of *Bluey*. We also found it a bit annoying because of, you know… morality. Yes, morality and such. We didn't want that to come from TV. Maybe it'll come later too. But I don't know if he'll demand more when it comes to watching things in the future. (Kristina & Stefan, two children aged 6 months and 3 years)

Kristina and Stefan's discussion of bad or unwanted content in relation to screen time makes it apparent that these issues are interlinked, forming complex understandings of why the content is considered bad. The show is not only "raucous," but ugly and moralizing (something that should not come from television programs). Morality is drawn on past experiences, but also from those formed between the family members as they assess what is acceptable or not acceptable. The child is not outside of this equation but is rather central to it. Both Kristina and Stefan feel they can control the viewing practices of their child when he is young. However, this is subject to change. The child is central to the parents' understanding of developing changes in screen time practices in the future.

As both parents mostly work from home, they continue to discuss how they feel they have a lot of control over their 6-month- and three-year-old children's screen time. However, in managing how the children use screens, Kristina notes that they are not allowed to interact with them (i.e., controlling screens themselves), but only to watch. As Stefan describes, that type of "play" simply "feels wrong" (Stefan). What feels wrong to Stefan forms the meaning of screen time and what competencies are believed to be required. The domestic space is organized a certain, and meaningful, way for families (Morgan 2011), and monitoring this space is important to the parents. However, the everyday is dynamic, as the parents note that one of their children may demand more and different screen

time in the future. Competence and meaning, then, are not static (which will be returned to later in this chapter). This also means that parenting around screen time is not static, and very much subject to the development of the children, even if the parents express apparently coherent and consistent ideals and practices.

All these complex underpinnings of competence – and meaning for that matter – are not possible without constantly evaluating and re-evaluating what the children are confronted with on screens and their screen practices. This reflexivity (Giddens 1991) is at the heart of this evaluation. In the life-world, "the social conventions produced and reproduced in our day-to-day activities are reflexively monitored by the agent as part of 'going on' in the variegated settings of our lives" (Giddens 1991:35). Parenting is reflexive in that practices are monitored by parents in terms of what is needed at any given time in daily life. Reflexivity is linked to notions of competencies and meaning, as these are the building blocks for what is supposed to be done in terms of children's screen time, including practices of regulation, restriction, monitoring, interfering, naturalizing and routinizing. When the parents also invoke experiences from their own childhood (experienced through their younger selves), competencies are open for an understanding in broader, more biographical contexts.

For example, Silje states that screen time meant something different when she was growing up: "It was *Disney Dags, Björnes Magasin*.[45] It was very special; it was a reward. It was great, cozy kind of" (Silje, one child aged 3). She continues to note that it is very different today, as she sees screen time as something without boundaries and too easily accessible. Competencies and practices are not static (Shove et al. 2012). Within the (cultural, social and historical) contexts in which they are understood, practices evolve and develop new and different characteristics, while some become obsolete. Parenting is then not a set of universal ideals and practices but situated within the contexts in which they are expressed, as both Hays (1996) and Furedi (2008) argue. Silje illustrates this in expressing that she believes screen time demands very different practices and holds very different meanings compared to when she was a child in the 1990s. This is based on her own subjective experience and social interactions, both as a parent and as a child. Silje bases competencies on her "embodied emotions" (Morgan 2011:111), her family practices relate to past emotional experiences. The contexts

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[45] Popular Swedish children's programs from the 1990s.

change over time, and so do values. The parents here express something that they experience as unique in the digital age, which, according to them, comes with an almost infinite stream of content. This makes understanding the parents' imaginary parental practices, to adapt Morgans (2011) concept, a way of understanding the contexts and conditions in which they are formed.

This is not only evident in the specific reflections of the parents, but also in how the parents draw on discourses and ideals that are recognizable as more general in nature.[46] This is often related to the perceived vulnerability of younger children and media use (Lafton et al. 2023), such as their particular vulnerability to "harmful" content. Again, referencing content as a source for limitation and restriction, Idun explains:

> There are so many influences that come up, things he of course wants to watch. At first, I didn't understand anything, like *Spider-Man*. It's an adult character, but […] there's something for kids called *Spidey*, which is aimed at younger children. But it's still very action-packed. And we're absolutely trying to minimize it […], but I don't know if it even works. We've been very strict about it, and it feels like it's only made him even more obsessed with it, being the only thing he wants to watch. And he makes up stories about it, of course, but he talks about them watching that kind of thing at preschool, and he's seen this and that, and he knows what it is. It's a lot, you know, a bit violent too, which he obviously picks up from other kids. (Idun, two children aged 6 months and 4 years)

Referencing a (easily recognizable) discourse on the harmful effects of media by referring to the notion that consuming violent content elicits violent behaviors or thinking, Idun tries to formulate her concerns that her child will come into contact with violent content. She centers this around the notion that this content is too "adult." This a way for Idun to protect her child, while also alluding to notions of protecting the actual childhood of her child. As Furedi (2008) discusses, the centrality of childhood itself as being at risk is a feature of paranoid parenting, creating anxiety for a perceived fragile and crucial stage in developing into a 'decent' human being. Idun is not only questioning the risks her child is exposed to, but also how childhood, constructed as innocent and vulnerable, must be protected. According to Idun, children should be exposed to appropriate content, not "adult characters."

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[46] This is, in part, conceptualized as horizons in Chapter 7.

Practices of restriction: Reflexivity and control

While the earlier parts of this chapter have dealt with screen time "annoyances" such as noise, inferior quality or unpleasant animation, the parents' statements also communicate a sense that more apparent risks are at play. Idun notes in relation to this: "I think one has some kind of idea that it pacifies the children, is that the word? That they get passive and that there is so much crap on TV." (Idun). Idun, who is slightly bewildered by why her son suddenly wants to watch the 'violent' television show Spider-Man, shows how perceived risks such as violence (see Drotner 1999 concerning media panics) are part of reflexive parenting. It is hardly controversial to say that parents assess screen time risks for their children both before, during and after screen activities. However, the way they negotiate and argue for their experiences contributes to a broader understanding of reflexive parenting. Reflexivity is almost constant when it comes to screen time, as modern (Western) society imposes an "increased amount of decisions and number of choices upon us" (Leung & Man Lam 2009). This feature of the digital age is referenced by Idun, who proclaim that navigating this content, toward which they have preconceived notions, is nearly impossible. She here demonstrates the levels of awareness of screen time that requires a huge emotional investment, which Hays (1996) suggests signifies modern day parenting.

While the above example draws on parental competence, it also shows how issues can arise from a certain lack of competencies. Reflexivity does not equate to "always having an answer" for any given situation. It is "a question of selecting between 'possible worlds'" (Giddens 1991:29). When these 'possible worlds' are not clearly defined, there is an uncertainty present that demands reflection and, in many cases, action. Idun has an ambivalent reflexive stance towards the content her child wants to watch. Her lack of competence regarding the content creates uncertainty and gives rise to an imminent sense of risk. While her worries are somewhat dampened by the realization that there is an adapted children's version of *Spider-Man*, she still expressed that letting her child watch the show was associated with risk. It is still "filled with action," something Idun and her partner try to minimize. The practices of screen time management, reflexive parenting and the parents' competencies are intertwined in what the parents define as 'acceptable' or 'harmful' content. The pressure around control, knowledge and management – identified as features of contemporary (Western) parenting culture

(Furedi 2008) – reveals how Idun (and most of the interviewed parents) can be understood to perceive reflexivity as crucial in relation to screen time.

When asked how she feels about being vigilant regarding what her children consume on television, Idun also notes how the domestic space plays a significant role in her management practices. Her family is preparing to move, and Idun proclaims: "We are so happy that we will have a separate TV room in the new apartment" (Idun, two children aged 6 months and 4 years). In her current apartment, the television is placed in the living room. However, having an open floor plan means that the screen is a distraction and becomes too central in her family's domestic life. When it is switched on, she notes, "all eyes are drawn to it." To Idun, the television often becomes a consuming force in the household, disrupting social interaction. She then imagines how space is important in her parenting practices around screen time. The television will have its own place, where, Idun notes, it will serve as a more "cozy" object they can gather around. Her intending of the television as either disruptive or a source of social interaction is based on how she imagines its space in her life-world. This can be understood as changing the meaning of the television, as well as the practices made up by this meaning (such as gathering the family for movie night).

In another interview with Nina and Albin, two parents in their early thirties living in southern Sweden, Nina, a teacher, addresses what she perceives as issues around screen time:

> In preschool, the most important aspects are social interactions and the learning you get from that, not sitting with an iPad to learn math. That's how I feel. And then I know they have other digital tools at preschool, like when they play something like *Just Dance*, I think it's called. Where they dance, and the screen shows them how to dance. I think that's totally fine for them to do. Or if they have a project about cats, where they go in together and watch videos about cats, I also think that's totally fine. But just free play on the screen, I don't see the point. (Nina, two children aged 2 months and 2 years)

As Albin, who works in customer service and is Nina's partner, runs up the stairs of the two-story apartment to check on the younger child, Nina and I discuss her views on screen time. Quite quickly, she – herself a teacher – reveals her concerns about screen use in pre-schools. Much like many of the other parents presented in this chapter, she addresses what she considers appropriate content for the

children. Content that is, almost by definition, risk-free is "fine" by Nina's standards, whether it be dancing or watching cat videos. Nonetheless, the screen is a risk and, as she notes, it could impact social interaction during an important stage of development. The "pluralization" of risks is in itself a risk (Beck 2012:43), which is expressed through the parents' understanding of the complex relationships between screens and child development. A screen is not only a screen; it denotes a near infinite number of activities, experiences and applications. In this sense, screen technologies "are bigger on the inside than they are on the outside" (Livingstone 2007:1). In late modern society, "technology is double-edged" (Giddens 1991:28), providing infinite opportunities while simultaneously introducing an abundance of risks. Nina clearly shows that she believes technology is imbued with these ambivalent, contrasting and contradictory meanings. She views what she calls "free gaming" as a senseless activity, with no purpose and harmful to socialization and social interaction, while watching cat videos together is not. Based on her perception of the plurality of screens and risks, Nina attempts to gain control over all aspects of her children's screen time. This "over-parenting" (Van Den Berge 2013:392) becomes a daunting task in the digital age and seemingly requires a wide spectrum of competencies.

Martin, explains how his family has employed material restrictions to minimize his children's screen time:

> I think it's about having accessible… not just accessible… but easily accessible alternatives. One thing is that we don't have a TV, so that kind of habitual watching just falls away. It's not so easily accessible. And they have limited time on the tablet and phone. But there's probably more easily accessible social interaction in the house, so there's always a closer alternative, and there are more things in the house as well. (Martin, three children aged 4, 8 and 11)

The practices Martin mentions – choosing not to have a television and limiting time on screen devices – are related to competencies in the way he understands specific practices around screen time. The absence of screen technology, even though tablets, smartphones and portable video games are available in the household, ascribes a certain meaning to Martin. As noted earlier, space itself is important in understanding domestic practices (Morgan 2011) and objects, such as screens, are in this instance meaningful materials to be experienced, not just devices of technological achievement. As has been discussed throughout, this is very much in line with how the parents discuss screen time, screen devices and

their related practices. In limiting the access to one such everyday material, it becomes more extraordinary in its absence. It is not easily accessible, and "routine watching" is restricted. This is a practice of limitation. By changing the domestic space from what is considered a more traditional set-up – having a television in the living room (see Livingstone 2018) – Martin feels that certain issues around screen time are mitigated. The television symbolizes an undesirable presence; its materiality (or absence thereof) becomes a norm in itself. Martin's practice of removing the television makes 'habitual' watching more difficult, something he sees as undesirable. Through his practice, Martin reproduces the ideals and norms connected to this type of watching, which is historically believed to be detrimental to children (Nakamuro et al. 2015).

However, this also leads to other discussions, as Martin's laptop is used as a replacement television for streaming. This, according to Martin, has led to a situation where "we try to come to an understanding together," as he sees the laptop and its uses as more diverse and negotiable than the television. The laptop is a democratic object to Martin, while also requiring more control (as it has more functions than a traditional television). Pernilla, studying in medical school and Martin's partner, continues to pinpoint that this control is important as she before had feared that this could "suddenly lead to free access to screens" (Pernilla). Pernilla still reveals that the children need to be involved in the discussion, while at the same time believes in a firm schedule around screen time. This argument becomes ambivalent. While the parents express certain classed values (notably middle-class), where parent-child discussions are considered paramount in the practices of child-rearing (Lareau 2011), they also believe in certain set rules. Competencies, then, are not solely imagined by the parents themselves; they are developed through the inclusion of the children's viewpoints. While the removal of the television was his (and his partner's) decision, how the new medium should be used to replace the uses of the removed device is a joint effort. Martin also tells me that the viewing of television programs has changed because of his actions, as he has greater control over viewing habits. Competencies may be developed in conjunction with the children's perspectives and experiences; however, a certain amount of control is necessary. The importance of the child's involvement, as a class-based norm, is a non-authoritarian perspective, while practices of control (e.g., not having a television) can be opaque or less 'visible.'

As Martin notes, changes in his family's immediate environment (not having a television set in the household) holds both meaning and is in itself a practice, which impacts the "paramount reality" (Schütz 1970) of his life-world. The action contains a certain awareness of the object as meaningful and exploring this reveals how screen time is routinized in the day-to-day of Martin and his family. As Idun puts it: "You didn't talk about screen time when we were young" (Idun, two children aged 6 months and 4 years), showing that while experiences of the phenomenon are both a feature of everyday life today, simply putting a name to it allows it to embody special meaning. Idun expresses that the nature of discussions around screens was similar when she was growing up, for example "watching too much television." The television as an object, as well as its related practices, becomes a symbol of screen time and norms around the potential effects (which are often very unclear).

Returning more specifically to parental competence and reflexivity in encountering situations which are experienced as requiring action, Nina formulates the temporal aspect of screen time:

> [I]f he could, he'd sit with screens all day. I mean… or maybe he'd get bored eventually, but our experience is that he can sit for hours. Especially with the iPad. We've seen it when we've been on car trips and such. There's just no stopping it. So that's part of the risk, too. But then we've also talked about how there's this irritation when we take it away from him. And we've always had this fear that he gets so angry. But, I mean, he almost always does. (Nina, two children aged 2 months and 2 years)

Not only does Nina compare her experience with others in a reflexive manner, she also focuses on another type of harm or risk than what has been discussed earlier in this chapter. She understands that her parental practices have consequences – restricting screen time can lead to the irritation or even anger. However, the risk she is addressing is the time spent on screens, not specific content or activities. This has a decidedly more general dimension, as Nina shifts between comparing her own experience to that of other parents and caregivers and highlighting the recurring nature of the situation. Nina does not seem to question the risks, as she seemingly experiences "the structure of the world" as "taken to be constant" (Schütz & Luckmann 1973:7). In this, she is reproducing the system of values (see Giddens 1991) of screens as inherently bad, which permeates the cultural contexts in which she acts. She draws on her own

experiences, as well as competencies handed down by previous generations, friends, institutions and others, to reflexively account for her practices. In this realization, Nina further explains that this is the reason she and her partner try as much as possible to limit, what she considers to be, excess screen time. Albin, Nina's partner, continues:

> [T]here's a lot of nagging about the tablet. And it feels like, I don't know… It ends up being the only thing he wants. Instead of just going out to play, it's like, 'No, now I want to sit indoors with it.' And it feels like, I don't know, for me that's the wrong direction for a child, you know, not being out at the playground but wanting to sit inside with the tablet instead. But it's also […] it's about going with your gut. (Albin)

Time spent on the screen is placed in stark contrast to time spent playing outside – a sentiment that is very familiar in public discourses, not only concerning screens but media use in general. This way of defining what is 'good' and 'bad' shows how the parents here draw on similar competencies, as they also have very similar, or even the same, experiences. What Albin frames as "going the wrong way in the childhood" is a question of parental competence – of the knowledge and subsequent practices that constitute screen time regulation. But there is also a need to address the centrality of the child's resistance to Albin's ideals. The child's experience seemingly intensifies the ideals that Albin expresses, as he expresses that childhood itself needs protection. Management and limitation are therefore crucial, as Nina continues to note that her son, if allowed, "would be sitting with screens all day long." This intersubjective relationship ultimately affects the ways in which the two parents' practices come into being. These practices seem to contradict certain contemporary middle-class ideals, where the child's own motivation is seen as the primary driving force in child-rearing (Stefansen & Aarseth 2011). At the same time, Nina notes that this is done for the well-being of the child. The argument becomes complex because Nina's practice of restricting screen time aims to protect the child (and childhood), while at the same time restricting what can be understood as the child's own interest (sitting with the tablet). These negotiations are therefore based on both class-based ideals of parenthood and discourses of harm and conflict, which Nina reproduces in her statements.

Nonetheless, these regulations are not always fixed, especially in temporal contexts. When asked about rules or any concrete approaches to handling screen time in their home, Anna states the following:

> We've discussed it quite a lot, and we also try to keep [the rules] flexible because they change depending on our needs, the child's needs and what we feel is okay over time. So we try… on the one hand, we want the rules to be clear—this sounds strange when I say it, but on the one hand, we want them to be clear to the child. On the other hand, we've said we have to test what works. (Anna, one child aged 6)

According to Anna, the practice is a "fluid" one, depending on the family's needs. She also mentions that this develops over time; it is not a static way of being. Competence is not something static, instead it is reflexive, transformative and adaptable. This negotiation between being simultaneously "clear" and adaptable to new situations illustrates the way in which navigation in the everyday life-world is dependent on the parents' competencies. Being reflexive and drawing on past experiences are not two different "mechanisms." They are, simply put, the whole of the negotiation. Anna is both mediating the horizons through her negotiation while illustrating the process of this mediation. The child's needs, as she puts it, become central once again. Anna illuminates the importance of being reflexive in understanding other's experiences, acknowledging her child's agency in the process. When she states that they "have to test what works," her child is very much included in this process. It is in the intersubjective interactions with her partner and her son that her family's screen time practices are formed. However, in oscillating between clear rules and an adaptable stance, Anna's statement remains contradictory, in a state of almost constant negotiation.

This adaptability is common among many of the parents interviewed for this dissertation. Sometimes, this is framed as nearly wholly negative, as Josefin, who works as an editor at a publishing company, notes, "I think that everyone has been in those situations when you need to abandon your principles just to get something solved" (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9). She is discussing this to explain the increase in screen time when she needs to work without distractions. Her principles, as she explains, hold up against her ideal of not creating situations when "there is a lot more screen than I would want." Josefin's principles are based in limitation – screen time is perceived as embodying excess. At the same time, screen time provides solutions where Josefin feels she needs to simply get things

done. These situations are exceptions to her principles, which she explains thoroughly to her children. As she notes in a closing statement around the question, "You can't stay at home just because you want to stay home and play [video games]."

Agreements and trust

As shown, competence and meaning can both be linked to reflexive parenting. However, to understand the kinds of reflexive agents the parents are, this type of reflexivity calls for deeper exploration. On a Zoom call with Doris, a graphic designer, and Erik, who is self-employed, discussing general media use in their home, Doris started by discussing screens, screen time and restrictions:

> We haven't really agreed that a parent must always sit with them. But I think if I… if I had left the child, the children, in front of the TV, you [nods at the father] would probably have commented on it, and I would definitely have commented if you had done it [laughs]. So, it's more like a silent agreement, I would say. (Doris, children aged 3 and 6)

Doris is essentially discussing how they perceive parenting as built on mutual understandings of what needs to be done. The experienced dynamic between the parents, and ultimately the children, demonstrates how intersubjective aspects are important to parental practices. It could be interpreted that Doris' practices and agency are intersubjectively "saturated" (Moran 2021) by her partner. With regard to the child's viewing habits, they seem to have shared or "joint agency" (Moran 2021), which is not verbalized or discussed in the moment. It is not clear how the parents have come to this "silent agreement." What is apparent, however, is that the only way this silent agreement can work is through the trust (see Giddens 1991) the parents have placed each other. Max, also exhibits the importance of trust, stating that his partner "trusts me with judging which games they can play and which they can't" (Max, two children aged 8 and 13). He addresses how the source of this trust is based on his own gaming experiences, as he has enjoyed digital games for many years. Gaming experiences are part of Max's parental competence, as well as establishing bonds of trust with his partner.

That notion of trust also enforces the coherent and intersubjective features of the life-world. Doris and Erik do not feel the need to address whether their child should be left alone in front of the TV, they are certain the other parent would

never do this. Only when asked about it in the interview do they reflect on these practices and situations. The way in which they consider watching television alone, unsupervised, as an ethical question, is in turn a certain type of competence that is closely tied to practices of screen time regulation. Unsupervised viewing is 'bad,' while supervised viewing is 'fine'. The parents acknowledge this as morally 'appropriate' parenting (see Hays 1996), where ideals around what the child should be exposed to (and subsequently learn) are placed front and center. Erik can be understood as referencing this as a contemporary feature of society, adding that the common view is that "it's inappropriate to put your child in front of a screen" (Erik). Their shared agency rests on a common understanding of screen time as harmful, which guides their domestic practices.

This kind of reflexivity is not always rational, analytical or even conscious; rather, it is something that Giddens (1991) dubs "non-conscious" (1991:36). Ideals are embodied in the negotiations and practices of the parents. Activities around screen time do not need to be constantly reflected upon. Instead, they are activated when parents are faced with the day-to-day circumstance in which they may occur. In re-telling this, however, the parents imagine a situation in which this would transpire in such a way that it would warrant further action.

> Doris: Today we watched *Djur med Julia* [laughs]. She visits different animals, and then you learn about things like tapirs and stuff.
>
> Erik: Well, sure, when there are certain programs like that… Sure, then okay. But there are programs that I avoid to the extent that he can barely watch them.
>
> Doris: Mmm, yes.
>
> Erik: Like, ones that are really popular among kids. They're so bad, it's unbelievable.
>
> Doris: But maybe they [the shows] don't give you anything as a parent [knowledge, enjoyment], and there's no way you can really tell the child this. (Doris & Erik)

While continuing to discuss their views on their children's television viewing habits, they mention how programs where the children actually "acquire knowledge" (as Doris puts it) is important to both of them. As the parents here evaluate children's programs as good or bad, they also evaluate the practice of

viewing as good or bad. They use their parental competencies, their parental "know-how" (Shove et al. 2012), to assign value to their children's screen time practices. Knowledge acquisition has a high value and can be understood as the social meaning that drives this practice. Learning, or the potential for learning, is highly valued by the parents. Here, knowledge could be considered an important resource, and the parents aim to provide their children with an opportunity to acquire knowledge. Learning is then seemingly a "self-evident part" (Stefansen & Aarseth 2011:396) of their family life and is based on organizational and promoting practices (see Lareau 2011). Avoiding 'bad' content and promoting educational content becomes an integral part of the family's approach. For Doris and Erik, promoting children's learning and education is a natural part of parenthood. As Doris expresses this: "I think knowledge is one of the main goals of life." Erik adds that he thinks it is important that this is "given early in life," marking how ambitious the parenting process is in promoting educational dimensions in early childhood (see Bach 2016). In order to live up to these ambitions, ideals must be shared and taken-for-granted. Often, these take the form of culturally classed ideals around what is important, such as the quest for education and knowledge that is ultimately "child-empowering" and "child-centered" (Huisman & Joy 2014:93). According to the parents, screen time should be beneficial and useful, not purely for "quantity time" (see Christensen 2002).

This dedication to the acquisition of knowledge also comes through in other interviews. Olle, a southern Sweden resident who works in landscaping, notes this when stating: "I think some games can be much more creative to play than just sitting there, watching the same episodes over and over. And that you can actually learn something from video games" (Olle, two children aged 2 and 5). Here, video games mean "learning something," while repetitively watching the same episode over and over is seen as much less creative. Märta makes a similar point when she notes that screens are 'better' if you can learn something: "I know you can learn stuff from the tablet, like being able to keep up with news or something. […] But I have probably said that it's better you read a book than look at the screen at times." (Märta, two children aged 3 and 7). Making these links between the elements of practice shows that parents are in constant negotiations with different values and norms, all while establishing their own imaginary practices. In turn, this leads to a modus operandi around the different screens and their associated practices in the household. However, the established norms and practices are not

autonomous but are based on existing ones (e.g., children's activities should be a place of learning or violent content is harmful). These are "active integrations of material, competence and meaning" (Shove et al. 2012:24) where the emphasis is placed on the notion of "active."[47] The examples above illustrate the activeness of the parents in their practices and moral negotiations. Nonetheless, as is seen with the "silent agreement" between Doris and Erik to not place their children in front of the television alone, activeness does not always equate to conscious decision-making. By reflecting on their experiences, these ideals become visible and available for further understanding. At times, ideals and practices around screen time appear "non-conscious," as these practices are seemingly performed without much thought. Certain norms are internalized and mediated through everyday practices and negotiations, reproducing specific cultural values (such as the importance of knowledge and child empowerment).

Understanding how competence and meaning are part of an evolving and active process is key to understanding it as the creation of values in the family and household. Ylva notes this change when addressing how the development of her child will impact her practices: "For now, I can say no. But there will be a time later on when this won't be possible" (Ylva, one child aged 7). This is a process in which the same type of uses and management have changed and evolved due to certain events, situations (e.g., the child getting older), upgrades and novel uses. When asked if her children have their own smartphones, Josefin replies:

> Well, it was like my partner's phone broke […] He needed a new one […] He got a new work phone and got to keep the old one, so it was like we had an extra phone. And then [the child] asked what it was. "Can I have it? Can I have it?" So, we decided, "Yes, he can have it," but he's not allowed to use it whenever he wants—it has to be on our terms. There was also the idea of Pokémon Go, like if he's at a friend's house and they do raid hour, he could join in, for example. But that's never actually happened. But the idea was that the phone could be his, but not for unrestricted use. (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9)

The old phone is therefore intended to provide the child with some kind of independence, as long as it remains within the control of the parents. The addition of this screen into the household is in need of negotiations that are both functional and moral in character. Objects, like people, have their own biographies

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[47] In this case, this can be in part equated to reflexivity.

(Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley 1994) – they can be understood as having life spans in which their uses, norms and values change and evolve. In many cases, it is easy to dismiss these devices as 'just' technology and to assume that these technologies act on us rather being acted upon by us (see Baym 2015 on technological determinism). After all, unrestrained and unrestricted technology can quickly become a source of harm. As Josefin illustrates, processes around screen time are social and experiential in character, while the technology itself is a dimension of the experience. What also becomes apparent is how these processes are based in both the parents' specific values and the wishes of the child. This makes the decision a further exemplification of joint agency, where the intersubjective context plays a significant role. These negotiations are, quite naturally, in part based on the will of the child, while restriction becomes a juxtaposition.

The practices and competencies that have been explored thus far are, to some degree, very specific.[48] However, in having mapped out the competencies required for certain screen time practices, the importance lies in how these competencies are drawn upon to form the practices and ideals associated with them. The elements are linked to each other in various contexts; they are interrelated (Shove et al. 2012), which means that the technologies (materiality), parenting ideals and skills (competence and meaning), and social interactions in everyday life (with, for example, their children) all interact to form a coherent understanding of the practices. For example, as Stefan and Kristina put it earlier in this chapter, they do not want morals to "come from television," which leads them to restrict certain types of content. The technological know-how and the parental "embodiment" as competencies are directly linked to the object in question – the screens on which these programs are shown – and the meaning, values and norms that the parents feel are associated with it (what they call "moralism").

Further, this is dependent on the intersubjective nature of the life-world, where interactions and negotiations between both the parents themselves and their children are important. On a higher level, this is a practice of what the parents believe is 'good' parenting, as Silje explains at the beginning of this chapter in terms of wanting to "make music accessible" to her child and "give him the best." This is a negotiation based on a heavily child-centered perspective, where parents' own moral foundation is often seen as most significant in children's upbringing

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[48] Shove et al. (2012) present examples that are at times much more general, such as the practice of driving.

(Hays 1996:92; also see Furedi 2008). Silje (like many other parents in this chapter) is striving to convey perceived 'beneficial' interests to her child. The focus on children's development remains a substantial part of the negotiation, at least in how the parents imagine what lies in their best interests. Essentially, this is, in practice, a reproduction of cultural ideals and norms. The unpacking of the practices adds to the understanding of not only the ideals around parenting, but how they are negotiated, embedded in values, practiced and reproduced in everyday life.

Independence and trust: Parents of teenagers

A majority of the parents in this chapter have young and younger children, as the management practices were more pronounced in the interviews with them. These parents seem to emphasize the struggles, ideals and practices around screen time in their statements. It seems natural to have more concern about the well-being of younger children. As children grow up and become pre-teens and teenagers, different needs and practices emerge. The parents all discuss screen time less in terms of temporality and more in terms of their children's health (e.g., screen-related health deficits and issues of online safety). Many of the parents note how both independence and closeness become increasingly significant in the relationship between parent and child. Lisa, an executive in a care company, puts it quite clearly when she states what she believes parenting itself is about: "To let them [the children] be fairly free but keep them sufficiently close to imprint the right values from our point of view" (Lisa, two children aged 16 and 17). Screen time is also often about balancing independence and imprinting these 'good' ideas and norms. Gerd also notes this balance when discussing how and when to restrict her children's screen time: "There's a balance to it, knowing how much I should interfere" (Gerd, two children aged 11 and 14).

Mimmi, a mother of three teenagers between thirteen and seventeen, states that she feels she has very little involvement and impact on her children's screen time. While she does not impose strict rules, she states that she often reflects on these practices, noting: "There are all these discussions popping up [...] Then you yourself see something on the screen around being expected to have some level of control as a parent" (Mimmi). Once again referencing the ideals of paranoid parenting (Furedi 2008), Mimmi questions whether she is doing parenting 'right,' especially when encountering content that references the subject. Signaling a

certain "lack of confidence" (Van Den Berge, 2013) in their parenting, the parents often cite this kind of ambivalence around screen time. Mimmi mentions how she, as a relatively young mother, envisions herself as being closer to the youth culture than some older parents. However, this does not mean she considers herself as having full insight into her children's lives. Mimmi tells me that it would be far too intrusive to invade her children's "own small worlds," noting that her approach to screen time management is about what Dermott (2016) calls "relative independence" (2016:138), balancing management and freedom.

Mimmi feels that what she calls the "family climate" should enable the children to "feel they can bring it [content or issues around screen use] up." The family climate she refers to seems to be based on the emotionality of the everyday (Giddens 1991), where feeling secure and enabling trust between parents and children is paramount. Edmund, a career counsellor and father of two sixteen-year-old daughters, notes how similar approaches to discussion and socializing are important, as he feels that screen time has, at times, taken over the domestic space, alienating family members from each other. According to Edmund, the consequences of screen time are that "you simply stop interacting" (Edmund). Edmund seems to express a fear that the household will lose its 'togetherness,' resulting in isolation. Astrid also notes what she does when she feels her family is just sitting around on their screens: "When there's too much dead time in front of the screen, then we'll say 'that's enough, let's shut it all off,' and then that's how it is" (Astrid, two children aged 11 and 14).

Josefin's screen time habits and practices center around this family climate, which she describes as very open. She facilitates this open climate by inviting the children to engage in, for example, watching television together. Contrary to previous examples, where parents describe television as a tool for learning, Josefin seems to describe watching television both as a social activity and a practice to manage her children's screen use. As the interview continues, it becomes clear that this is a practice that aims to create balance. Josefin wants to be involved in her children's lives, while at the same time giving them the independence they need as teenagers (thus having no strict screen time regulations). Apart from this, another form of balance becomes visible. In creating a good family climate (e.g., through joint screen time) she also makes it easier to manage the activity. If the children feel they can discuss their issues openly, Josefin does not feel the need to closely monitor their screen time. The children's agency is thus paramount to her, and

she seems to consider this essential to creating a good family climate. Ludvig, a teacher in a small Swedish town, notes how he feels maintaining this climate is important, as the openness is "mirrored in the children, so they find pleasure in all sorts of things" (Ludvig, three children aged 15, 22, and 25).

Competencies are formed as part of the ideals Josefin encounters in her everyday life, as well as the interactions within her family. She further notes how these competencies and practices have come into being. She never used screens to keep her children calm and busy (when they were very young). She provides and example of this when discussing how she sees all the children in front of screens on the train, exclaiming: "That's cheating." She links her resistance to the "easy" way of parenting to the fact that she was educated in a Waldorf school, where technology was frowned upon (especially television). The competencies and meaning that make up her parental practices are based in inter-linked experiences where screen time is seen as cheating or bad parenting. These linked and biographical, experiences provide a specific coherence and contributes to the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life (Schütz 1970). Moreover, Josefin feels parenting should at least be a little bit difficult and require effort, which she feels will provide better results in her children's upbringing. This creates "an exaggerated sense" of responsibility that position contemporary parenting as all-encompassing in the child's development (Hays 1996:99). In her current situation, however, Josefin declares that she has a much more relaxed attitude towards screen time, and she wonders if her own restrictive upbringing has ultimately made her have an "opposite reaction" to domestic media technology.

Lisa also places importance on a certain type of closeness. Screen time has its dedicated place in the evenings when the whole family gathers to prioritize interaction: "In the evening […] we are supposed to talk. We're very careful to not squander the moments and to make time for talking" (Lisa, two children aged 16 and 17). While this mostly happens when the family is gathered for dinner, Lisa acknowledges that the television has become "a social hub of sorts." The television provides a backdrop for interaction, and she describes the television as being on in the "background" during the evenings. Lisa views screen time mostly as time spent on mobile devices, more specifically, gaming. At the same time, she notes that her children have never been that interested in screens or gaming, not even when they were younger. As such, Lisa never felt the need to impose limits or have any specific rules in place. The children are therefore a large part of how

Lisa adapts her screen time management practices, which are based on a desire to create spaces to interact and "talk." Her competencies are based on freedom, independence and trust. Lisa exemplifies this trust further, echoing the sentiments of Mimmi. The household, according to her, should consist of a family climate where there "is no shame in bringing it [issues around screen use] up."

Lisa notes that her practices changed when her children first became teenagers. While no restrictions where in place in the family, surveillance was sometimes an option. Lisa notes that she previously "has had to sneak in [to their rooms] and grab that phone and check what's on there" (Lisa). Trust, as a parental competence, is therefore not as clear cut. The climate in the family is created to make trust possible, while Lisa still questions whether this trust is merited. This encompasses both a heavy focus on the children's well-being and their actual screen practices. Trust, skepticism and surveillance are exemplified here, as Lisa is committed to ensuring her children become "independent and confident people," ideals that signify features of paranoid parenting (Furedi 2008). Screen time once again becomes a telling example in how parenting is tied to contemporary ideals and practices, and symbolic of parenting done 'right' or 'wrong.' Trust and independence are conditioned, and they sometimes elicit very specific practices (such as checking her children's phones).

While the temporal aspects of screen time were not as central in the interviews with parents of teenagers, Vera, an administration worker in a smaller Swedish town, still notes that this has presented problems in their everyday life: "It [screen use] has claimed a lot of time at different points in time for everyone in our family" (Vera, two children aged 16). Edmund, who is Veras' partner, continues to explain how their perspective on screen time has changed since their children first got their smartphones:

> We've had issues with the kids' screen time when they just got their phones and stuff like that. But that was another matter. It was more about trying to get them to stop or to have some normal relationship with it. (Edmund)

Edmund notes how the decision to even provide their children with smartphones was based on the uncertainty of what can be "hidden" behind the screens. The imaginary family practices (Morgan 2011) were based on how these hidden threats would be able to be mitigated. According to Edmund, screen devices, and their practices, constitute such a large dimension of everyday life that "in the end

you're considered more or less terrible parent if you don't give it to them." This presents a contradiction in these ideals – Edmund is being a 'bad' parent if he does not restrict screen time, but he is also considered a 'bad' parent if he does not provide his children with smartphones. These insecurities relate to paranoid parenting (Furedi 2008) and are part of the everyday negotiations around screens and screen time. In relation to screen time, parenting is not only based on practices of restriction, but also on providing children with the access to the objects of everyday life that media technologies comprise in the digital age. Restriction is again juxtaposed against the will and experience of the child, as explored earlier in this chapter. Edmund states that practices that became increasingly significant as the children got older were giving them "reality checks," where they were asked to evaluate what they are actually doing on the screen. His screen-time management practices included providing prompts for his children so that they could self-regulate and feel empowered. This is also a form of independence-making, so that his children can become reflexive (see Giddens 1991) in accordance with his own views and ideals.

Monitoring practices and lack of competence

As harm and risks seem more prevalent in discussions around screen time, the specific competencies needed to regulate screen time are not always readily available. The lack of competence itself can at times be considered a risk. The meaning of media use and screen time in the household is often ambivalent and at times contradictory. In this section, Josefin and Ylva's experiences will serve to exemplify both how this ambivalence is expressed and how monitoring practices can have an impact on both competencies and ideals. While the management practices may seem systematic or highly rational at times, they are often far from it. When asked how she feels about screen time debates and recommendations, Josefin responds:

> Well, I haven't kept up with it much, but there was something recently, like with adult men, that creativity declines, and IQ drops and things like that. I almost feel like I've gotten a bit dumber myself. Like you really have to decide, 'Now I'm going to read something challenging,' instead of mindlessly scrolling when you're really tired. Or that you really have to make an effort because there's always something else, like candy, that you can grab instead. And why would a child be able to handle it if I find it hard myself? (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9)

A common sentiment that is shared by many parents in this dissertation is that they struggle with their own screen use, while at the same time, they are expected to regulate and monitor their children's screen practices. This creates a degree of insecurity in their child-rearing practices (see Furedi 2008), a certain "lack of confidence" (Van Den Berge 2013). While competencies can be partially understood in isolation, they ultimately need to be put in larger contexts to be fully understood. As seen with Josefin, parental competencies around screen time do not rely solely on direct interactions with the child but also on reflecting on one's own use of media technologies, screen time and self-monitoring. Shove et al. (2012) argue that monitoring is a large part of practices and feedback, noting that "it is only because knowledge is carried forward" that one (and others) can assess the way in which the outcome is "right" (2012:99).[49] While arguing that Josefin lacks certain competencies may seem a bit deterministic, there are genuine concerns raised about her ability to regulate her child's screen time while aiming for a "healthy" approach. Monitoring, as well as self-monitoring, is not an autonomous practice that sits outside of the practice studied but is part of "the enactment of a practice" (Shove et al. 2012:100).

Monitoring could be understood as a large part of the regulation of screen time; however, focusing on monitoring and self-monitoring helps in understanding the practice on a larger scale. For example, Josefin notes that she herself "feels that she has become dumber" in relation to, what she feels, is excessive screen time. This example clearly illustrates the way in which her practices of regulation feed into how she imagines the risks of screens, which is often expressed in terms of morality. In relation to the ideology of intensive parenting, the organization of practices is built "around what is presumed to be best for the child" (Faircloth 2023). Her own screen practices and ideals are in danger of being passed on to her child, which causes her to monitor her own practices even more closely. Josefin acknowledges this when stating: "I don't want it to be built in too strong too early, the fact that the drug is always there" (Josefin). Her approach to monitoring this practice is trying to read something "more advanced," to counter "getting dumber." Regulation of screen time does not, at least in this case, equate to less time on screens, but higher levels of quality time spent with screen

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[49] Shove et al. (2012) are discussing cement mixing, which may seem far removed from the more abstract concept of parenting competencies. However, their discussion on feedback and monitoring applies to a much wider argument and diverse practices.

technologies. This argument, according to Josefin, is a competence that affects the way she regulates her children's screen time as well.

A sense of ambivalence is strongly associated with the feeling that screen time management practices need monitoring. In the discussion above, this ambivalence is evident in the transferable competence of regulation from self-regulation is transferred to regulate someone else's screen time. Returning to a previous example from Chapter 4, Ylva is asked to reflect on what she thought was harmful when she felt she needed to restrict her son's screen time with regard to the computer game Minecraft.

> My impression of Minecraft was that it had quite a lot of [violence] too. But I think I was fascinated by how creative it was, how much you could build, and all the other things, even though there are zombies and villagers that you fight against. I think I was fascinated by all the creations. (Ylva, one child aged 7)

Initially, Ylva's overall impression of video games was that they were violent. After learning about the objectives and possibilities of the game, Ylva adapts her views based on the knowledge obtained through monitoring. The way in which her ambivalence towards the game is transformed and takes another shape is notable. She still feels her initial reactions were somewhat legitimate, but they were "softened" when she actually learned about the game and monitored her son's play. When asked why she had these feelings about the game, she responds that she "thinks she is generally very sensitive to violence" (Ylva). Elaborating further, she expresses that this type of content is often directed towards boys, and she feels this is potentially harmful both in practice but also in the way it genders children. These ideals are tied to Ylva's feelings that she needs to monitor the practices, meaning both her son's game play and the way in which she learns and assesses her regulation practices. The child is again central to Ylva's changed view on Minecraft. The creative play she discovers through monitoring impacts her own ideas and subsequent practices (allowing her son to play the game quite freely).

As Shove et al. (2012) note, it is not always easy to "separate monitoring from doing" (2012:99). Linking screen time practices to parental competencies, as well as the way in which parents build up these competencies, monitoring is depicted as a crucial part of these practices. In a more anecdotal form, Josefin continues to illustrate the links between practice, monitoring and feelings of ambivalence:

> I think it was also something when our eldest was quite young, about three. We let him watch YouTube sometimes, very colorful clips. At the time, we thought, 'How fun, he's learning a bit of English.' And then we noticed how strong his reaction was when we took away whatever screen it was back then. Maybe it was a tablet, I don't know. And it felt like, 'This isn't really healthy, I'm giving drugs to my child, and this reaction is so, so strong.' Like, completely. (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9)

Simply put, practices of regulating screen time need to be evaluated and adapted to be able to be satisfactory. In many cases, the feeling of ambivalence makes this evaluation and monitoring process more difficult. The initial feeling of joy and acceptance Josefin feels declines when monitoring her son's game play arises from monitoring her own regulation practices, what she actually feels she is doing when giving her child the tablet. and the child's screen practices. The gravity of the device proves a problem for Josefin to the extent that she eventually refers to the screen as a "drug" (in a negative way). It is "complete," quoting Josefin. The way in which her regulation practices then shift toward a more restrictive stance is reliant on monitoring. The benefit of learning English is undercut by her feeling that the screen is becoming like a drug. This leads to a change in the nature of her practice, which becomes more restrictive. In this way, competencies are also evaluated through feedback from others and through self-reflection and monitoring. As the case of Josefin demonstrates, this type of dynamic evaluation demands continuous reflexivity.

Practices of regulation are not only tied to the present but are also imagined practices in which new competencies will likely need to be applied or acquired. New situations elicit new imaginary practices (Morgan 2011). One way of putting this is that when Ylva, who was skeptical of Minecraft, noted that she had been able to successfully monitor her child's screen time and activities, which changed her understanding of the game, but more importantly, the meaning of her child's game play. However, almost in the same breath, she acknowledges how this feeling of "control" is fragile.

> He doesn't watch YouTube, for example, and I try to maintain that. That's something I've managed to keep pretty strict so far. We can look things up or watch something together, but not just sit and scroll on YouTube. So, for now, I feel like I still have control, but I know it won't last much longer. As soon as he gets his own phone, I think, I'll lose all that control. (Ylva, one child aged 7)

Here and in many other places in this chapter, competence is based on conceptions of trust, a trust that is in many ways a "protective cocoon,"[50] an emotional defense against perceived everyday risks (Giddens 1991:40). For Ylva, this competence is conditioned by the age of her child; this protective cocoon will only be in place until her son gets his own phone and gains more independence. The act of watching something together is part of the creation of a protective cocoon, though it is not always clear against what it protects. The practice of regulation is the practice of creating such a cocoon to protect against all the imagined harmful effects of screen technology and content. Restriction and monitoring are both parts of this emotional protection. Free access to YouTube is not an option; it needs regulation. In this scenario, there is also the perceived risk of losing control when a new, rather personal, screen is introduced into the household. While this risk is an imagined one situated temporally in the future, it shows how having established monitoring practices is essential to the 'successful' execution of these practices. Experience is a product of past experiences and acquired knowledge (Schütz 1970:72), which seems to exclude any sort of imagined, future experiences. What it means is that this "stock of previous experiences" (Ibid) deals with the surrounding life-world and all that it entails. Public debates, friends, family, recommendations, etc. are part of the experience of the life-world. Definitively tracing the source of Ylva's fear that she will lose control when her son receives his own smart phone is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, by isolating and understanding this fear as a genuine experienced anxiety, it adds to the complexity of why screen time regulation practices are perceived as wholly necessary.

Balancing acts: 'Feeling' screen time

The imagined risks the parents express are, however, not constrained to the present; the parents do not only reflect on what is closest to them, whether temporal aspects or spatial. Closer in time and proximity, there is often a sense of a constant need for regulation, a need for screen management practices. However, these risks are often articulated in a way that signals a taken-for-grantedness. The risks of screen use are, in that sense, an internalized and routinized part of the parents' life-world. Risks are not out of the ordinary, they are within the mundane

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[50] Emphasis in original

day-to-day living, visible in the parents' reflexive negotiations and practices. Their experience is "unquestionable" (see Schütz & Luckmann 1973:4). The term unquestionable does not mean they cannot question the situation they are in; it means that they simply take that situation for granted, with all that this encompasses. It is happening, and things continue to happen; that is what is unquestionable for the parents. Sitting across from Ester, I comment on her previous discussion on the struggles of keeping screen time in check by noting that it must be difficult to be the one with ultimate responsibility.

> No, no, absolutely. And you do… yeah, kind of like that. So the worry about losing control, I think that's really what it's about. But as I said, that… I think that worry would exist anyway, outside of me. It's just that it gets bigger with [screens]. Because I think that's what you're worried about with teenage kids (laughs). […] And there, I also have to realize that I can't be part of everything either. I have to take a step back because our relationship is going to change now. And what does that mean for us? How do I protect you in the right way? (Ester, one child aged 8)

A feeling of persistent worry "outside of myself," as Ester puts it, is not a specific worry about time spent on screens or harmful content; it is a worry that exists as part of being a parent and wanting the best for your developing child and your relationship with her. The 'best' also includes elements of freedom, of having to "take a step back." Martin shares this sentiment in his interview, saying that as a parent, you "don't want to have too much control over the relationships [your children] make" (Martin, three children aged 4, 8 and 11). He ties this to practices of control, as he feels that asking his children to turn off their devices is not always straight-forward. These reflections are tied to notions of competencies. Competencies and reflexivity, in a phenomenological sense, refer to the individual's position towards the world around them – it is through experiences of parenting, for example, that competencies are shaped and ultimately drawn upon. The reflexive stance to daily life is "an act of attention" (Schütz 1970:63), and the parents are drawing on their competencies to be attentive to their practices of control (and letting go of this control). This means having to negotiate between different, often contradictory modes of management. Too much control can be intrusive and perceived as 'over-parenting,' while restriction remains an important aspect in terms of screen time. However, this is not without a certain insecurity; as Olle notes: "It's scary that there will be a point in time when you won't have

that much control. [...] I think parents have always felt that way when their children start having their own lives" (Olle, two children aged 2 and 5). Family practices are "rarely a matter of calculation", they are more often based on emotion and 'feeling' something (Morgan 2011:11, 111). Risks are tied to striking a balance between freedom and control, which can indeed be very emotional. Svante emphasizes this balance in terms of gaming: "I won't turn into a dictator, but I am going to be very careful about which games I introduce [the child] to" (Svante, two children aged 3 months and 3 years). This carefulness, he explains, is paradoxically grounded in how much he is looking forward to playing games together with his son in the future.

These sentiments are common among the parents, as they often negotiate the need to balance between control and the perceived freedom or independence of their children. The children's experience then becomes central to these dimensions of control, often relying on their age (the parents of younger children have stricter practices, for example). Control then becomes an integral part of screen time and everyday life, often focused on the children's right to their own lives. Albin, father of two young children, questions the amount of control a parent should have around screen time: "How much are you allowed to control and limit?" This shows how different practices and negotiations are inter-linked with notions of how to parent. Within the "stream of pure duration" (Schütz 1970:63), experiences are not separable from each other; we are simply living them in an ever transforming and indistinguishable flow. This perspective is what constitutes the life-world, a flow of happenings that are all part of the same context. Phenomena are "always already there and over there at an experiential 'distance' from me-as-subject" (Legrand 2012:287). Screen time is 'always there' in many forms; in practices around the phenomenon, many ideals and norms are reproduced (such as ideals around parental control). The experiences of the parents are based in the natural attitude (see Husserl 1995); screens are part of the independent world as tangible objects outside of the parents' subjective experiences. With these objects, screen time is continuously valued as an issue. The negotiations can also be based on imaginary practices (see Morgan 2011). As Olle states when asked about his and his partner's lack of experiences of certain screen content and platforms: "You just apply a bunch of ideas on how it [content and platforms] functions." Olle illustrates how everyday life is often based on improvisation in relation to these uncertainties. Simultaneously, the experience is part of the intersubjective, as Olle notes that ideas he encounters around said

content and platforms "colors his impression" of them. Mimmi, with her three teenagers, also notes this when it comes to unknown content: "I absolutely feel I have no control over that. It's a world that is giant, totally enormous" (Mimmi, three children aged 13, 15 and 17). While screens and uses are always there, they are not always 'close' to the parents, and that can at times be daunting.

Experience is not, however, always a reflexive act – not in the sense that reflexivity is a conscious (or non-conscious) act of reflecting on the continuous events that occur. Living can be experienced as instinctive – simply 'living' – and reflexivity then only becomes attainable in being observed (as in being interviewed). Life is, at times, more felt than constantly reflected upon. As with many of the parents in this study, the notion of screen time does not often involve the element of time. On the Zoom call with Kristina and her partner Stefan, parents of two children aged 6 months and 3 years, I ask if they adopt any sort of time constraints in their children's screen use.

> No set time. Sometimes I say no when he wants to watch TV, just so we both learn that I can say no. You can't always get what you want. But that applies to everything. And it's more like, if he's watched a lot of TV in the morning, I think we don't need to watch so much TV in the afternoon, so then it's a no. But it's not like we have a set time limit we stick to. It's just a general feeling that he should run around a bit. (Kristina)

"[S]imply living within" the flow of pure duration (see Schütz 1970) is interrupted by reflexive action, however blurry these lines may seem. There is a certain ordering to the everyday in the parents' lives – an ordering not solely based on how events unfold, but also on how they are compartmentalized and structure the way in which they lead their lives. As Kristina states, there is no set time limit; instead, she bases the limit on a feeling. Britta also notes this when describing times when she feels she has spent too much time on screens herself: "I really recognize the way he feels and then I try to give him the support I might have needed myself to drop the screen. To find other alternatives" (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4). These practices are often based on balance – a balance that is based on a feeling. Martin also discusses this, stating that days with a lot of screen time "just feel different in your body; it's interesting the feelings you get as a parent."

Although the parents here do not adhere to specific rules regarding screen time (which most of them do not), time is an important aspect in the life-world. "Time

is not just extended duration but involves relations of simultaneity across space,"[51] as Couldry and Hepp note (2016:101). Time is not just a way of structuring daily life; it is about what kind of temporality is imagined. Temporality refers to the ways in which the parents understand the different contexts that envelop their daily experiences. This is simultaneously tied to space, as in how and where daily events unfold. As Kristina notes, there is no set screen time; However, the need for regulation is felt rather than pre-determined. She also uses screen time to develop her parental competencies, which include the ability to say no to her child. There are, therefore, different experiential 'distances' at play in how the mother experiences her relationship with her child and screen time. One is that of competence – that is, the ability to say no and teach the child that "one cannot always get what one wants" (Kristina). Another is the sense of temporality (as in what she feels is excessive screen time). Yet another is how the activities she reflects on should be divided throughout the day. The life-world is highly complex in this sense; there are not always clearly drawn lines between events, reasons, actions and regulation.

The ways in which the parents engage with the world around them often rely on feelings of what is right and what is wrong (or ambivalence towards these notions). There are, of course, rational choices being made, but parents are more likely to emphasize the importance of their feeling.

> I want them to be kids and practice being human, not just numbing themselves. I think that's important. I think that's the biggest danger. Not the screen itself, but what it takes time away from. That's it. That's the thing. That's why I'm a bit restrictive about it. (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9)

Everyday practices are then often "emotional rather than simply cognitive" (Giddens 1991:38) in the way that we as individuals perceive daily life as taken-for-granted. It is in this way of feeling that the life-world is often understood. The feeling that too much time has passed leads to a sense of restrictiveness from Josefin. However, Josefin does not primarily worry about the time that is spent on screens, but the time that is lost elsewhere, which leads to restriction and a desire to control. Gerd, mother of an eleven- and fourteen-year-old, notes that even though she wants to have some control over her children's balance between

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[51] Emphasis in original.

screen time and other activities, she still "realize[s] that it's simply not possible."
In the interview with Ylva, reasoning around balance, control and temporal
aspects are important:

> And I think we feel much better if we just do other things together. […] [S]creens
> take up so, so much more [time]. They take up more and more of my time too.
> And I know it. I get stuck [on screens] too, sitting there, doing completely
> unnecessary things. (Ylva, one child aged 7)

Values and ideals become central to the temporal aspects of screen time in these
discussions, as does the way in which the world appears "subjectively meaningful
[…] as a coherent world" (Berger & Luckmann 1971:33). Giving something
meaning (e.g., screen time) is a process of creating this coherent world, a way in
which interpretation makes the everyday tangible. A reflexive stance is precisely
the process in which the parents interpret experiences to make daily life consistent.
The feeling that one activity, such as screen time, takes away valuable time from
something else disrupts this feeling of consistency.[52] This creates a fear of missing
out on other activities that are (more) central to the socialization process of the
children. The parents can be understood as "social educators" (Bach 2016:57),
marking the importance of a social, active and well-rounded life for their children.
Screen time regulation practices thus become practices of "bracketing" anxieties
and fears. This bracketing "provides modes of orientation" (1991:37), which in
many ways deal with the existential questions that arise in everyday life, however
small they may be. For the parents, feeling is a large part of this bracketing of
anxieties. As Kristina notes when talking about the fast "kicks" her son gets from
using the iPad: "You don't really know if it's wrong, it just kind of feels wrong."
Competencies are thus based on what parents feel is right or wrong, which means
they are not distinct or separate-able from moral questions.

Labeling screen activities as "unnecessary things" raises questions about what is
necessary to the parent in question. When discussing which activities the child
should spend more time on outside of screens, the question is about valuing
different activities differently. These competencies are about feeling, as well as a
feeling of 'knowing' (e.g., feeling that sports are better than video games, but to
the parents, this often feels like knowing), which are not values created in a

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[52] Giddens (1991) explains this as feelings of "ontological security."

vacuum. Morgan (2011) argues that family practices are "implicated in a whole range of social institutions and sets of practices" (2012:2), which is also the case for parental practices. Values – understood as ideals and norms – are reproduced in the practices of the parents, for example, when they feel how much time is a 'good' or 'appropriate' amount of screen time.

What these seemingly very different parental accounts of screen time management show is the interplay and intersubjectivity inherent in the everyday. Baym (2015) sums up the way in which screen technologies have become prevalent in contemporary cultures as: "What once seemed marvelous and strange, capable of creating greatness and horror, is now so ordinary as to be invisible" (2015:70). This speaks to the discussion of the domestication of media technology (which is what Baym is referencing), but also the way in which technology becomes taken for granted in the life-world of the parents. The parents' concerns range from near existential crises (e.g., "What if I lose contact with my child?") to worries about the way media use changes their way of life or what screen time takes away from other, often perceived as more important, activities.

Conclusion

What has been discussed in this chapter is how screen time is linked to regulation practices that rely on the parents' competencies and reflexivity in negotiating uses in the household. These practices include restricting content through the press of a button or the swipe of a screen, allowing a child to continue watching TV and closely (or not closely) monitoring what is being displayed on the screen. Practices are at the forefront of this discussion, as the parents reflect on them in the interviews. This means that the arguments presented here rely on the parents' reflexivity in the interviews, as well as an understanding of their reflexive stance. Reflexivity operates on two levels: it is part of the ongoing negotiation of screens and daily life in the household, and it enables an individual to understand their own practices, norms and experiences and articulate them. This is, however, not always explicit. Understanding reflexivity and competence as a dualism allows for a thorough unpacking of these issues. Parents reflect on all of these issues, often simultaneously, and this chapter has been dedicated to deconstructing how these issues can be linked to what the parents feel they are and should be doing to regulate screen time in their family's everyday life. As the parents quoted in this chapter have stated, screen time can be part of a rational decision-making process,

either through limitation and control or simply getting a feeling for what is right. Screen time is an integral part of everyday practices and is inter-linked with a complex set of other acts that give form to what it means to simply live one's life.

Not only does the everyday experience of media and media uses seem 'natural' and routinized, but the very management of screen time also seems 'naturalized' – as a taken for granted part of the parents' life-worlds. As a part of everyday life, the objects and their presence are taken for granted, as is the regulation of these objects. While screen regulation practices refer to a broad range of activities, they are often based on specific values that remain important to the parents. At times, these are values that are felt rather than wholly knowable, while others are more concrete, for example, the importance of 'good' music, making technologies less accessible, seeking knowledge or promoting creative digital games. These norms are further reproduced through the parents, and the parents note that it is important that these values are passed on to their children. Meaning making is thus highly active in the parents' everyday practices around screen time. This includes the child's own will and experience, which are often positioned in relation to management and regulatory practices. Often, these ideas and norms relate to ideals around contemporary parenthood and social class, such as cultural taste or equipping your child with the 'right' resources (as in knowledge or a creative mind). These practices are not independent; they rely on systems of values around screens as sources of harm, uncreative play, wasted time, noise, and 'bad' content. The centrality of the child's well-being in these practices becomes paramount. The parental practices are also often geared towards child empowerment for the future (see Huisman & Joy 2014), making the perceived long-term impact of parental screen time practices fundamental.

As is shown here, ideals and practices are not easily separated, nor is this desirable. Morgan (2011) concludes that the relationship between theory and practice is complex, arguing that there is a "contrast between the everyday public accounting that social actors routinely engage in during their encounters with others and the ongoing everyday flow of life in families, organizations, leisure activities or whatever" (Morgan 2011:20). The "contrast" becomes apparent when attempting to assign the relevant concept to either perspective. This can be the case when parents only allow a certain kind of content to be consumed, while prohibiting other content or physically removing the screen device from their children. These practices also include the parents' attempts to create a balance between other,

often 'better' activities, which are consistently viewed as distinct from screen time. Further, parental competencies relate to learning about content (e.g., *Minecraft*), thus creating new meanings in their domestic screen time management practices. However, management practices can be more complex and attain more ambivalent meanings. Screen time, as with the parents of teenagers, can also be part of an independence making process. This often involves practices that foster a climate of openness, closeness and trust in the family. This openness becomes crucial for the parents to balance their own monitoring and their child's self-monitoring (what Edmund calls giving his children reality checks).

Several aspects have been discussed here and should be understood as parts of a whole. Competencies – in the way that they are relied upon for knowledge – as well as the life-world, (understood as a contextual and subjective realm of experience) and reflexivity (in the sense that practices and contexts need to be part of an interpretation) form a framework of practices that enables detailed investigation. As the practices of screen time regulation are reflected upon in the interviews (and not observed), the parents show an understanding of their own competence (or lack thereof) that is invaluable in unpacking their meaning-making processes. This type of reflexivity provides both a reflection on the practices themselves but also on their meaning and the context of their life-world. In this way, the connections needed to create a theoretical understanding have already been established. This approach facilitates an understanding of how these practices are closely tied to experiences of media technologies in the everyday in which the parents live.

6. Doing it 'right': The moral matters of screen time

The previous chapters have primarily explored the ways in which participants have discussed their practices around screen time, as well as the norms and ideals on which these practices are built. These chapters certainly dealt with the intersubjective life-world, though mostly between family members. The following chapter focuses more on morality, subjectivity and the intersubjective life-world of the parents. Notions of how screen time is highly context-dependent, how moral negotiations around the phenomenon are understood and how screen time is at the center of what Finch (2007) calls family displays, constitute the themes of this chapter. The moral issues of screen time and the parents' everyday life are investigated as what Putnam (1990) calls "motives of duty". In the first part of the chapter, I explore how the parents negotiate these motives of duty. In the second part, I argue that parents morally display (Finch 2007) their parenthood in relation to other parents, drawing on this motive of duty. These sections should be understood as a further exploration of the participants' everyday life as a moral one.

Moral negotiations and a pluralization of screen times

Although screen time may feel like and be routinized as a 'natural' part of the movements through the day-to-day, this does not mean it is ascribed no value or neutral, either in terms of meaning or practice. As Josefin points out: "It's kind of sensitive" (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9), indicating that values and meanings around screen time are not unproblematic. Tina, who works as a nurse, also finds screen time difficult to discuss at times, stating: "It's pretty difficult to navigate, a little bit of a minefield" (Tina, two children aged 2 and 5). Both mothers indicate that certain norms are connected to the phenomenon, as they discuss why they feel screen time is sometimes a difficult subject to address. To

Josefin, child-rearing is a very personal matter. Therefore, her screen time practices are often "based on prejudice" (Josefin). Josefin notes that feelings of shame and strong emotions are involved in discussions around screen time. Olle, Tina's partner, also notes this, saying that when people discuss screen time, it is almost always in negative terms. Josefin addresses how feelings around screen time are contextual, as she notes that her son is given more screen time when he is sick, and she is forced to stay home to take care of him. She exclaims that these are moments when "standards are changed, and you loosen the rules a bit." Changing the standards is still related to feelings of shame, which strongly connects Josefin's emotions to giving up some of the control she feels she *should* be having over screen time.

As Josefin describes, the practices seem to be based in the centrality of the child's development, and the parental responsibilities surrounding it. Rules are only "loosened" when extraordinary contexts present themselves. Her discussion exhibits how negotiations around screen time are not only context dependent but are part of moral negotiations. Screen time is not one thing; it is dependent on the context in which it is experienced – in this case, by the parents in the different "small life-worlds" (see Luckmann 1970) in which they act. Practically all parents in this study mentioned the problematic aspects of screen time as a reference point in their negotiations, where their intentions regarding the phenomenon are influenced by these ideals. These internalized ideals are reproduced as "personal moral values" around screen time (as noted by Sandberg et al. 2024a), which impact the way in which Josefin morally negotiates her son's everyday screen practices. Märta, who compared screen time to weekend candy in Chapter 4, exhibits how screen time is almost always positioned as something bad, even when the parents argue otherwise. Screen time is far from neutral, even though many parents attempt to "neutralize" or routinize the phenomenon. Here, Märta shows that her everyday screen time negotiations are also connected to morality:

> But you try not to create fixations on things or give them different value [screens]. Because whatever you take away, you're also valuing as [something worth having] […] It sends a signal that it's more valuable to have it than to not have it [the screen]. Otherwise, it wouldn't be a punishment to take it away. So, try to punish with as few things as possible, and instead neutralize and normalize. (Märta, two children aged 4 and 7)

Märta can be understood as not wanting to place too much focus or value on screens and screen time, as this would signal to her children that screens have a high "value". To her, it is better that the screen retains more of a neutral value, as this creates less confrontation. The ways in which Märta attempts to make screen time a phenomenon of inattention is then grounded in the notion of assigning a different value to certain activities. It is important to her not to go into "confrontational mode" around screen time, as the feels this adds an extraordinary dimension to the phenomenon. She believes that forbidding screens or imposing stricter rules would make the devices more desirable. While she still acknowledges that she struggles with her children's screen use, she is adamant that screen time should be seen as a more neutral activity, in no way distinct or more valuable than other activities. While this is a theme that is prevalent in previous chapters, the way Märta expresses the ideas suggests "neutralizing" something, which is related to the way she values screen time as a practice and ideal. While she does not want more screen time in the household (this would be, as she says, "troublesome"), she does not believe reduced access should be seen as a punishment. Instead, she dedicates her efforts to making screen time a 'neutral' and routine phenomenon, which to her would lead to less conflict in her family's everyday life. This requires extraordinary investment, teetering on Märta being "morally and emotionally overinvested" (Hays 1996:2), when it comes to managing screen time. Märta's practices here are based in moral deliberation, and her negotiations around it are morally complex. On the one hand, being neutral is the absence of morality, but this neutrality is based on valuing screen time in a moral way (often in terms of excess – as bad or harmful).

Furthermore, by acknowledging that screen time is something that can indeed work as punishment (taking screen time away), the moral dimensions become more complex, even paradoxical at times. Max references this paradox, and the investment it requires, as he states that their screen time rules are "invisible": "We don't say it out loud. Because if we do, they will do nothing else" (Max, two children aged 8 and 13). Their rules, as he explains, are that there in fact are no rules. Having no rules does not mean that the perceived harms of screen time are not acknowledged. Max still mentions the danger of the children finding out about this unspoken rule and spending all their time on screens, which is not desirable. He mentions that the unspoken rules are still the parents' responsibility to uphold, the "freedom" is not negotiable from the child's standpoint. The children should still be protected from certain content – Max mentions YouTube

as a site of anxiety – which makes his and his partner's "no rules"-approach paradoxical. Screen time and media use in the home is often impacted by the way in which the parents set their expectations around them (Lafton et al. 2024). This again shows how moral dimensions often come through when discussing screen time, even when the parents feel that restriction is not the right path. Britta also feels that screen time is not always something that needs to be restricted:

> After you've been outside, playing video games can be a suitable activity. It's cozy, and you're tired. But it can also be an activity like reading a book or taking a bath. These three should be equivalent. These are calm activities, cozy activities. (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4)

Britta describes that these screen time practices are part of winding down. In her effort to make screen time part of everyday life, where it is just one activity among others, Britta imagines the phenomenon and practice (in specific instances) similarly to other calming and comforting practices. This is usually in the afternoon or at night, she states, when the whole family is a bit tired. Similar to video games, the specific activity of using screen time to wind down, like video games, is positioned as equivalent to reading a book or taking a bath. In certain other situations, Britta feels that screen time is instead problematic. In the morning, for example, playing video games is restricted, as it interferes with getting ready for preschool. Depending on the context, screen time is transformed in the "flow of everyday life" (see Moores 2017), both in terms of how it is managed and valued. This shows how practices and values around screen time are highly complex and transform through everyday movements.

The context thus appears to be pivotal, as the value of different screen time practices depends on the specific context – in this case, recuperation.[53] Britta's statement can be understood as the formation of her own "scheme of reference" (Schütz 1970), in which screen time can be intended as an experience and practice of relaxation, depending on context. Ascribing these values to screen time places these experiences as equals, as Britta can be understood as explaining. On the surface, this negotiation (re)values digital games in terms of screen time but can

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[53] This plurality denotes both the way in which screen time fluctuates in practice and meaning, depending on multiple factors. These do not only include the time of day or a specific activity. The plurality of screen times is also dependent on internal and external family ideals (that the parents express).

also be understood as a moral project, part of the routinization of everyday life.[54] In comparison to other mundane practices (such as taking a bath), Britta feels screen time needs to be put in a certain context to be 'appropriate.' Appropriate screen time is sometimes connected to promoting the child's interests, as Pernilla explains when talking about her daughter:

> It can really be anything. I mean, [the child] is quite interested. She's interested in drawing but also in clothes and design. And those are things she can also develop through her screen by finding inspiration. So, it's not entirely bad […] and she can use a lot of drawing apps, for example. (Pernilla, three children aged 4, 8 and 11)

Screen time is thus part of the child's broader interest in clothing and design. This reflexive reasoning makes screen time part of a spectrum of activities that are seen as 'good' and beneficial to the child's creativity. I this way, the child also has an impact on the way these moral issues are depicted and negotiated. Once again, the centrality of the child's development (as discussed by Hays 1996) into a creative and inspired human being is paramount. While this is part of what Pernilla imagines as 'good' parenthood, it also represents ideals that are based on cultural taste and related to social class. Middle-class parents are thought to dedicate a lot of resources to their children's interest and talents. They are "constantly working to help them achieve their potential" (Faevelen et al. 2024; see Lareau 2011). However, not all activities are treated equally, as this is also based on what is perceived as 'beneficial' for the child (such as artistic creativity). Screen time can be construed as both stifling and fostering creativity, depending on the child's activities.

Morality is tied to values around screen time, as well as parental skepticism around the functions of screen use. While Pernilla feels that creative apps are fine, they are still screen time, which is associated with harm. This becomes telling when she notes that although the drawing apps can be creative and inspiring, she would much rather see her daughter "using her hands instead," as this "makes it easier to learn things in the future" (Pernilla). Again, Pernilla is negotiating in terms of her daughter's potential, signaling a long-term commitment to her abilities. This is

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[54] In domestication theory, for example, this is conceptualized as the moral economy, a moral system of transactions that includes arguments on new technologies being purchased and brought into the home (Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley 1992).

often tied to middle-class values, which Pernilla reproduces through her negotiations and practices of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2011), where these are assembled around her daughter's creative endeavors. This negotiation is a moral one. Screen time can be inspirational and creative, but it seemingly never ceases to restrict and hinder, or at least threatens to do so. The future is imagined as a scenario where screen time restricts child development, however, Pernilla negotiates the perceived benefits. These dimensions of ambivalence are notable in many of the parents' stories. Olle, a father of two children aged two and five, refers to his experience of this when talking about how screen use seems to limit his daughter's imagination:

> The brain gets a bit lazy, and it takes a long time until you figure out fun things to do. You don't immediately get the idea to build a slide from your bed with stuffed animals beneath. [When not on screens] a lot of these things start to happen. You don't get the urge to do these things as much when you get to just watch a lot [of screens]. (Olle)

The above reflects Olle's observations when his five-year-old daughter is given, what he considers to be, excessive screen time. This is usually connected to the tablet they own, which his daughter uses by herself. As we were discussing this during an interview at Olle and Tina's apartment, at the dinner table, we heard their daughter playing in the next room, without the tablet. Olle acknowledges how he values creativity in his children and tries his best to promote this. His experience is that screens extend the "take-off distance" for creativity, such as drawing, role play or building fantasy structures. This influences his management and restriction of the screen devices in the household. He says he has talked about this with his daughter, trying to explain that excessive screen time "makes it boring to play." Olle's reasoning behind this is that his children are forced to come up with their own ways to prevent non-screen activities from becoming boring. As with Pernilla, Olle exhibits how creativity is tied to childhood and child development in terms of agency and should be promoted (preferably without the use of screens). Screen time and screens are part of a phenomenon that is experienced as colonizing creativity, which Olle sees as problematic. This hinders the promotion and cultivation (see Lareau 2011) of creative abilities. Olle describes screen time later in the interview as a frequent feeling like that his children (while also referring to his own screen use) are "putting time into nothing" (Olle). This section shows how moral negotiations can create a plurality

of *screen times*, experienced differently in specific contexts. These include experiences of meaninglessness, coziness, creativity, obstacles to child development and laziness, all of which are dependent on the context in which the phenomenon is experienced and made sense of.

Morality as a motive of duty

Both contexts and related activities seem to have an impact on the moral reasoning around screen time and how its related practices appear. The parents often (if not always) strive to make the life-world a coherent place, with repetitive acts and routines that are taken as a 'natural' progression through daily life (see Chapter 4). In their own life-worlds, the parents also establish moral foundations and contexts by negotiating screen time as routinized or "natural." As has been illustrated up to this point, the parents are, to use Schütz's (1973) words, "wide-awake" in this regard. They are attentive to the way screens are handled in their daily life, they think about these issues actively and they often act upon their ideas (deciding on doing nothing is also a cognitive and conscious act). The attention given to screen time is, however, not unproblematic, as detailed in many places in this dissertation. The ways in which screen time is valued and negotiated create certain types of meaning, often related to moral issues. During an interview, Olof, who regularly conveys his line of thinking in compelling and convincing metaphors, he starts to describe media technology and screen devices in interacting with his three-year-old child. Sitting beside him, his wife Silje nods slowly as he speaks.

> [Using screens in child-rearing] is like being at work and not doing your work properly but still getting through the day. You might not feel satisfied when you go home. Maybe not exactly but… Because the times I've felt most satisfied are also the times we've been out in the woods or something, well, not used technology. And that's because it's become this negative thing then, when you've not made the effort. It depends on how you view parenthood; that it's about making an effort. (Olof, one child aged 3)

Olof understands using screen time in these contexts as not meeting the perceived standards of parenthood. It is work not 'properly' done, leaving him unsatisfied with his efforts (during this metaphor, his wife nods with even greater emphasis). He continues to note that not making an effort in child-rearing is almost like cheating, and it leaves him feeling unsatisfied. To Olof, parenting *should* make

you feel exhausted. Silje abruptly questions his line of thinking. She feels that the most satisfying days with her son have not been exhausting. There are days when she has not felt she needed to make any effort at all. However, these are also days when screens have not been used. She recounts an anecdote when her three-year-old son was quietly playing with wooden blocks. Silje herself felt she could just lie beside him in his room, enjoying the peace of playtime. When screens are being used, she feels this peace is almost impossible to achieve. Screen time is simply distracting, perceived as bad almost every time the parents mention the practice and phenomenon during the interview.

These arguments relate to relatively common examples in debates around the 'proper' use of media. Both parents understand screen time as something related to their parenting practices, while also expressing the values and meanings behind these practices. Again returning to Mills (1959), the parents see this as "personal troubles," and certain values are "threatened." Connecting values of parenting to "making an effort" is a telling example of how screen time can contribute to a feeling of not being adequately invested or "satisfied", as Olof describes, with the parenting being done. While neither parent mentions in what ways, if any, they try to remedy these experienced inadequacies the ideas they put forward are inherently moral in nature. In the complex navigation of screen time in the everyday, this is not always easy. As Nina notes: "Now there are so many things to watch and so on […] So I think it's difficult for us [as parents] to do the right thing or do good" (Nina, two children aged 2 months and 3 years). Nina is referencing the overwhelming number of screens, uses and content, making it difficult for her to navigate what is 'good' and what is not. This requires significant effort, Nina states, which can be exhausting. Jeffrey (2021b) notes this in her study on Australian parents, stating that the upholding of good parenting ideals and practices in terms of screen time demands extensive time commitment and effort, again tying into the ideology of intensive parenting (Hays 1996), and norms often tied to the middle-class (see Lareau 2011).

The values that are related to screen use and child-rearing are positionings in moral arguments, and the way Olof compares screen use and being outside in nature is even more telling in the way he considers screen use. Even though there is no clear 'right' or 'wrong' approach, there is a notion that there is something that is 'more right' and 'less right.' As Putnam (1990) argues, a discussion around morality can never be consistent with either a purely subjective experience of

morality or a distinctive situation of objective 'rights' and 'wrongs' (which may be construed at an institutional or natural scientific level). The subjective experience of something being right or true is not isolated to singular experiences. Quite the opposite, as "the different mental states of such speakers do not prevent them from sharing the same world" (Ben-Menahem 2016:230). The parents above act from what Putnam calls a "motive of duty" (1990:150), pursuing something that is more satisfactory than using screen technologies in child-rearing. They not only bring attention to the contexts around screen time and screen use, but also to morality. The life-world is a vantage point with multiple horizons (Schütz 1970:245), as places of opportunity or outcome, and the parents are describing these horizons as ideas and potential situations.[55]

> Yes, people are quite defensive when it comes to screens. We talked about it with a parent of a preschooler. She said, 'I know, I'm the world's worst parent, but my daughter gets to watch… She sits with the tablet every morning when we're getting ready to leave. I know, you're not supposed to do that.' She immediately had a defense. And other friends say, 'We don't read at night, instead, the child watches a movie, and it's shameful.' (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4)

Britta discusses how feelings of inadequacy are associated with feelings of shame and defensiveness, an account that is even more directly related to a feeling of being 'wrong' or even being a 'bad' parent. Frank, working in building maintenance and father of a six-year-old, explains that "you might think it's a bit shameful to admit certain aspects of it [screen time]" (Frank). These family practices have a "'built-in' character of emotional work" (Morgan 2011:114), which seems directed both towards managing one's own feelings of inadequacy (and hiding it), as well as those deemed detriment to the child.[56] These emotional dimensions ultimately influence how family life is 'structured'. Screen time, more specifically 'excessive' screen time, seems to carry with it a very strong motive of duty. Mimmi notes that it is the time spent on screens, the perceived excess, that is often at the center of her discussions with others:

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[55] While horizons is introduced here as a concept, Chapter 7 is dedicated to an exploration of the horizons around screen time.

[56] Morgan (2011) distinguishes between emotional 'work', which is related to emotional (unpaid) family practices, and emotional 'labor', which is paid, often public and related to care, service and other professions (such as sex work) (see Hochschild 1989; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003).

[T]hen it's really related to the amount of time, because I think the content is never really an issue—that's something you control a lot as an adult anyway. […] [T]here's never any talk about a four-year-old watching porn; that's not the worry. It's just about how much they can watch. And am I lazy, […] am I a bad parent? It's so tied to that, […] like it's this… like a little babysitter. (Mimmi, three children aged 13, 15 and 17)

Mimmi discusses how temporality is a moral question – the time she allows her children to spend on screens becomes a valued practice. She defines this as being lazy and being a bad parent because she is not giving enough attention to screen time. While her children are now all teenagers, she relates these ideas to experiences when they were younger. Continuing, she describes how she remembers picking her children up from preschool, and how the preschool workers used screens (she is adamant to note that she really loved the children's preschool). This was, according to Mimmi, especially prominent in situations where the children needed to be calmed down. She explains how she felt that this was something that complicated her domestic life, where her children became accustomed to using a screen to calm down. These experiences made Mimmi even more aware of screen use in the home, even though she never adopted strict rules. The argument Mimmi makes becomes a telling example of the ways in which intersubjective dimensions affect her screen time practices and values. Her motive of duty is based on how she values screen time practices in a complex and inter-linked web of experiences.

Ambivalence is also a factor, as using the screen as a babysitter is considered helpful at times. This moral negotiation puts the objects themselves at the center of the values of expected parental practices (see Sparrman et al. 2016) in contemporary parenthood. The objects, here the screen devices, are valued objects as they are intended by the parents. As Drummond and Rinofner-Kreidl (2020) explain when discussing Husserl and moral phenomenology, "to experience a value is to have an intentional feeling or emotion grasp its object as values" (2020:289). Screen devices and their related practices are imagined a certain way and are associated with several, often ambivalent, motives of duty. As Mimmi and other parents have noted, strong feelings of shame and inadequacy emerge around these motives of duty as the objects themselves, as well as related practices, are subjectively valued.

While this puts the object and phenomenon of screens and screen time at the core of the argument, the intersubjective dimensions are very much part of the moral

discussion. Morality as a notion of values and perceived truths is both internal and externalized (Timmons 1991). Good parenting practices are dependent on the intersubjective relationship with the children in the family, other social actors (for example the preschool) and other parents. Mimmi notes how she had more contact with other parents when the children were younger, and she would pick them up and drop them off at friend's houses. Now, she says, "the children take care of those things themselves" (Mimmi, three children aged 13, 15 and 17). Her values are dependent on the internal and external, as well as the developing and changing contexts. However, in her negative description of herself as lazy, this perceived laziness must belong to a context. This feeling is expressed as an internal trait. It is in many ways an internalized ideal around 'good' parenting (see Huisman & Joy 2014). Laziness is tied to feelings of non-engagement to more active child-rearing, where screens are instead perceived as a tool for pacification. This becomes part of her moral negotiations and is reproduced as related to middle-class values, where 'good' parenting often equates to being fully engaged with the child (see Hays 1996; Lareau 2011).

At the same time, her notion of laziness is projected externally in her interaction with her children's screen time, and these practices do not only occur in the domestic space. The use of screen time in child-rearing has negative connotations and is associated with laziness, a value perceived "objectively" as not ideal.[57] Olof further alludes to these negative connotations, describing screen time as a cheat code for parenting practices:[58]

> [H]aving these screens… If you're a bit tired as a parent sometimes, it's like having a cheat code you can punch in whenever you feel the need to relax. And it's quite awful to have access to that cheat code because then you constantly need the discipline not to use it if your goal is to minimize screen time. (Olof, one child aged 3)

While a cheat code can be understood as something that makes life easier, Olof explains this in almost entirely negative terms. He sees the access to this cheat

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[57] The question is if anything is objective, a discussion I will not have in this text. Therefore I have opted to put objective within quotation marks.

[58] Olof discusses this as a cheat code within video games, used to gain benefits that make the game easier. However, this is also understood as subverting the intentions of games, such as the inherent difficulty and gaming experience.

code as "terrible," suggesting that using screen time in child-rearing is associated with bad parenting practices. According to Olof, not using this cheat code requires discipline. The metaphor suggests that good parenthood relies on discipline and something that can be understood as 'real.' Using the cheat code is not real parenting; it is circumventing 'good' practices, subverting them. Olof is describing an ideal — the ability to be a fully engaged parent, without cheating. This not only alludes to the ability to fully engage but also demonstrates the expectations that this is what good parenting entails (see Dermott 2016). References to cheating suggest that being present and engaged are accepted as good parenting practices and good parenthood. Many of the parents in this study relate the same type of negative feelings (e.g., feelings of shame) to questions around screen time. Frank and Mona, who works as a clerk, note:

> Frank: But I don't feel like we've actively taken a position or talked to our friends with young kids about it. Like, how much do they watch? How much do you watch? Or how do you handle phones? No, because I think it's a bit shameful, this whole thing about how much time my child spends watching… yeah, whatever.
>
> Mona: It's a sensitive question. (Mona & Frank, one child aged 6)

Frank and his partner Mona, who live in the countryside in southern Sweden, state that screen time is a sensitive issue because they feel there are seldom "good" discussions around screen time, especially with other parents. They note that this is based on covering up feelings of shame or inadequacy, displaying (see Finch 2007) notions of good parenthood as consistent and almost perfect.[59] When asked how they discuss the subject with others, Frank notes that there has to be a lot of "effort" put in by all parents to actually have a reasonable discussion around screen time. As he states, it is often when things are not working that the discussion can address the subject in an "authentic" way. Screen time is a central question in modern times, Mona adds, and "everyone knows the premises." The values of screen time are within the schemes of reference of the parents' social world and how they imagine contemporary parenting culture.

From a phenomenological perspective, this means that the object – for example, a smart phone, television set or a tablet – is a physical object that exists as it is, a

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[59] The notion of parental display, based on Finch's (2007) family display, is further explored in the later parts of this chapter.

screen-clad device, but the way in which it is embodied with value is through the intentionality of the parents.[60] In order to feel shame there must be an object that elicits these feelings. The intention of the parents is subjective, while the objects and their related practices reside in a shared reality of natural thought (see Husserl 1995). Screen time, as a concept in the everyday of these parents, is impossible to detach from either object or practice, which are at the center of these moral experiences. While the phenomenological understanding of morality is in no way uniform across the philosophical tradition (Drummond & Rinofner-Kreidl 2020), the understanding of a "context-dependence" (Ibid:290) of moral inquiries around objects and practices (such as screens and screen time) forms the basis of this argument.[61] How the parents imagine screen time seems "filtered by social values, and thus bear[s] a relation with morality because they mobilize collective utopian or dystopian prefiguration of possible future social transformations and the way towards them" (Certomá 2021). The ideals and values are filtered through negotiations around moral questions and brings forward possible scenarios.[62]

Everybody wants to be perfect: Living up to the motives of duty

A significant number of the parents interviewed for this study associate screen time with something that needs limiting, where excessive use is met with feelings of shame and inadequacy. To return to Moores (2017), the parents' "movement" through everyday life with screens has a distinct moral dimension, even if the everyday often demands improvisation (e.g., when the parents need time for themselves or to get work done). Frank can be understood as perceiving this movement, noting how "everyone wants to do well." Continuing the interview with Mona, she again chimes in, stating that: "Exactly, everyone wants to do the right thing" (Mona, one child aged 6). This is the grounding of parenting as motives of duty, doing "well" and "the right thing." Olof, referring to a discussion

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[60] This does not mean that all digital screens are valued the same way. There is a broad spectrum of the objects themselves and what they represent to different families and parents.

[61] For example, Schütz does not engage in ethics in his texts.

[62] Again, this is revisited in Chapter 7, where the focus is on the horizons of the lifeworld, as well as the ideals and values that are encountered through various sources and adapted and negotiated in the parents' everyday life.

around control that his partner had raised earlier in the interview, notes that ideals are not based on anything realistic: "Like you were talking about before, there might be an aspect of control. You try to make it like it appears to you in your head, a kind of perfect image" (Olof, one child aged 3). As Bengtsson (2007) notes, everyday life's changing contexts impact the moral navigations around how media becomes part of daily life. While these contexts change, doing the 'right' thing, an unattainable perfection, remains a guiding light.

The perfect image only exists as a utopian construction. As Doris notes: "In a perfect world, I would have tried to get it down, not the number of hours per se, but the quantity of time he spends in front of the screen" (Doris, two children aged 3 and 6). While the parents' depictions are indeed utopian imaginaries, the parents can still be understood as striving for this kind of relative perfection. This revolves around emotional work, as a "production of care" (Roman 2004:66)[63]. Doris' own everyday strategy for this is to lie to her son about forgetting her smartphone at home when picking him up from daycare, just so she'll be free of the nagging (and her son will feel calmer). She continues to describe the feeling when she actually does give him the phone so she can cook dinner in peace as "it's so fucking nice, it's such a relief" (Doris). This discussion places emphasis on the high demand for emotional resources (and the relief when receiving a break from these pressures), which parents feel they are expected to have at their disposal in contemporary parenting (Hays 1996). Within this negotiation, where parents strive to do the right thing – the 'good' thing – the role of screen time in parental experience and parenting cultures becomes visible. One mother discusses the significance of managing screen time in her family, while another mother states that practices of navigating screen time in the everyday are built on emotion.

> And then there's the enormous responsibility of raising children so they can become functioning individuals in society in the future. We've worked a lot with examples, admonitions and good examples, of course. To help them become the best people they can be. (Ylva, one child aged 7)

> Then it feels like it's about balance… and it's very, I would say, emotionally driven in some way. When you feel like, oh no, there's been too much screen time, and you get this uncomfortable feeling about it. (Pernilla, three children aged 4, 8 and 11)

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[63] Author's translation from Swedish.

As the two mothers above explain, feelings and notions of what is good are part of the practices around screen time. While Ylva, a single mother of a seven-year-old son, focuses on bringing up her children to be well-adjusted individuals, Pernilla reflects on the downside of screen time – the feeling of discomfort that comes up when screen time becomes excessive. Lareau (2011) calls this perspective the "concerted development" in child-rearing, which she noticed among the middle-class. What is considered good for the child is promoted, which contributes to a certain organization of specific activities. Ylva relates this to what she has read online: "Children who get screens very early don't develop as well when it comes to vocabulary and language" (Ylva). Her "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2011) consists of negating these developments, promoting her son's interest in music (which, paradoxically, she tells me, is also often done on a screen). Music, to Ylva, holds values that are worth promoting.[64] This cultivation is based in practices of organization and promotion, as well as what is deemed worthy of promoting.

These two statements can be seen as examples of "emotionally charged" practices (Morgan 2011:122); they refer to the same type of practices (cultivating the children's development) in terms of morals, with imagined success and failure as two positions. However, while Ylva sees an end game in managing screen time in daily life (her child becoming a functioning individual), Pernilla's feelings seemingly emanate from feelings of doing something wrong, of failing to do the 'right' thing. These insights signify how contemporary parenthood is full of insecurities around 'right' and 'wrong' parenting (Furedi 2008). As other parents have noted in this study, this often comes down to the saturation of screens and screen uses in everyday life, as well as the values these bring to the table. As screens are seemingly wholly incorporated into daily life, so is the constant navigation of the attached meanings. Not only does this question entail what the right thing to do is, it also centers on what is right for the child. These questions are partially addressed in Chapter 5. However, while there may be as many ways to articulate this as there are individuals who answer the question, there are clear patterns in how these negotiations look when deconstructed. These are often based on the fear that a child will 'not turn out ok' due to excessive screen time. Simply put, the parents are fearful that their child will become deviant.

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[64] These values of music as symbolic capital, to use Bourdieu's term, were also visible in an example at the beginning of Chapter 5.

In a phenomenological sense, the stigmatization is part of the intention – the parents are in many ways stigmatizing themselves in relation to the phenomenon. Feelings of shame, inadequacy, uneasiness and discomfort when trying to manage children's screen time are all a form of self-stigmatization, which has also been noted in the Swedish context by Sandberg et al. (2024a; 2024b). This stigmatization is based in the reflexiveness of the parents, which can be understood from both Ylva's and Pernilla's statement. As a mother of three children aged four, eight and eleven, Pernilla is attentive to how much screen time her children are subjected to, and when the limits (her understanding of them) of these activities are breached, she has feelings of discomfort. She experiences these boundaries as almost inherently morally sharp, which becomes evident when she describes days when she feels at ease: "Other days it's like, 'oh god, it's so nice because today there's been practically nothing [screen time] at all and there's been no nagging about it either.' That gives you some kind of comfort again" (Pernilla). There is a feeling of well-being when she is allowed to be inattentive – on days when she is not forced to deal with screen time.

The parents' attentiveness can take different forms and relate to different questions. Josefin states that regarding screen time, she "thinks a lot of people have a guilty conscience" (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9). Anders, a father two children aged six months and five years, also puts it in almost the exact same way, noting that "it's a feeling I have, that everyone around it [screen time] has a guilty conscience all the time" (Anders). This guilt is based on the system of values that screen time embodies as a phenomenon. Besides adding to the discussion on what emotions are linked to screen time, Josefin and Anders note how they think others think and feel about screen time. This way of comparing often has underlying values and norms that are revealed in different ways during the interviews.

Morality in displaying parenthood

The moral question of screen time also encompasses how parenthood as identity can be understood from the vantage point of the phenomenon. The way in which the parents discuss their views on media use, screen time and what parenting actually means to them often emerge in the interviews. When Gerd is asked about her ambivalent feelings around screen time, she notes that the phenomenon can be a source of stress (a statement that also encompasses her perceived and experienced ideals of parenthood):

> When I'm on my phone, I convince myself in some way that I'm resting, that it's my break, you know. Then other times, I can get a little stressed, like, oh god, here we are, all of us, and it almost feels ugly—here we are, all sitting with our screens. Now we have to, like, bake cinnamon buns or something. You want to be that perfect, wholesome parent. […] After a while, I get a bit stressed and feel like we need to do something real. (Gerd, two children aged 11 and 14)

Being a "wholesome parent," is how Gerd can be understood as valuing her notion of good parenthood. What she perceives as her family's 'quality time' (see Christensen 2002) is contextual, and she has to "convince herself" that being on phones can actually constitute this. Quality time is more often in stark contrast to screen use and screen time, which becomes something "almost ugly" to Gerd. For example, when Gerd comes home from work and her children are tired from a full day of school, screen time is certainly a way to wind down. Gerd's own experience of what is "enough" screen time is often based on her own screen use. She notes that when she feels like she is just mindlessly scrolling, she starts looking around the room. When she notices her children are also on their screens, this is when she questions their screen time and attempts to interrupt it. She explains this as becoming "double" – her experience is based both in her own practices and how she perceives her role as a parent when her children are deep into their screens. The subjective experience is based on this intersubjective context, which causes Gerd's feelings to become amplified. Doing parenthood, in this way, concerns practices connected to ideals around the identity of 'good' parenthood (see Dermott 2016) and how Gerd understands this identity. It is also a definition of what constitutes her family and her family's everyday life. Baking buns together is doing family and being a good parent – of good parenthood.

The types of practices that Gerd discusses can be understood as forms of family displays (see Finch 2007) in that they exhibit, towards the family members, how this specific family is to be understood. As Finch (2007) notes, besides the concept of doing family (Morgan 1996; 2011) and understanding families as being constituted through family practices, families also need to display how these family practices are done. Displays are based on the contexts of contemporary family life, in which the norms and values specific to these contexts are revealed. Finch (2007) goes on to cite the "fundamentally social nature of family practices" (2007:66) as one of the main arguments for the concept of display. Gerd is in many ways ambivalent, displaying – albeit in her reflection directed to me as the

interviewer – what she feels constitutes good parenthood, both as ideal and practice. Siv and Anders reflect on how other parents become a comparative element around screen time:

> Anders: But it was probably more anxiety-inducing in the beginning, like when we talked about it last time, or even more so a year before that. You thought more about it, especially since [child's name] is our first child—you don't really know, you know.

> Siv: How it affects them.

> Anders: Yeah, you have no idea how it affects them or what other parents are doing. It feels like you don't think as much about what you should be doing now. At least when it comes to screens.

> Siv: Now we've mostly been around other parents, so we know they do the same thing.

> Anders: Or isn't it worse, though? Especially when [others say they have it] worse, it feels good, you know. Like, it's definitely something. Like when you hear someone uses YouTube to put their kid to sleep, and you think: 'Well, at least we don't do that,' we still read books. (Siv & Anders, two children aged 6 months and 5 years)

Display also becomes comparative in this sense, as both Siv and Anders position themselves and create boundaries around activities and "not being as bad as other parents." Reading a book before bed is morally good, while other parents use YouTube videos when putting their children to bed. They note that as long as their older son (whom they are primarily discussing) has what the two parents perceive as the fundamentals, such as being read to, fed and bathed, screen time is fine to a certain extent. This becomes clear in how they compare themselves to other parents, noting that it is experienced as "kind of a competition" (Anders). Siv notes that these ideals have changed, as a couple of years ago she felt that her son's childhood was supposed to be similar to her childhood. She notes that she has given up on that "weird ideal." She has realized that her upbringing and childhood experiences are their own horizon. This has also made her change the way she thinks about screen time, even if there still is a comparative side to it. Siv

closes the discussion by stating that in terms of screen time in the family, "I think we are pretty moderate" (Siv).

The idea that is proposed by the parents is that there is a comparative morality – what is perceived as good is displayed in contrast to what is perceived as bad, which is 'inappropriate' screen time. Britta notes that this happens without much thought, almost reflexively: "[Screen time] is something you automatically want to reduce" (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4). This clearly positions screen time in terms of what is good and what is bad, where the reference point for good practices is as little screen time as possible. In the interview with Beata, this display can be understood as crucial in constructing the ideals the family is built on:

> Sometimes I honestly feel like I want to explain myself to people when they're like, 'But it's really important to have a strict [screen time policy], to take it away.' Or if I just feel that pressure, and sometimes I try to explain, 'This is how we've chosen to do it; we think it works.' (Beata, two children aged 8 and 11)

Beata feels she wants to explain and make herself understood by other parents in terms of her thoughts on screen time. She perceives the benefit of keeping her family's screen time as an open discussion, without strict rules and time limits. As she perceives other parents' values and ideals to be focused on "strict" regulations, her own display becomes complicated. Both her children have their own smartphones, and she feels that other parents often shame her for this, as they interpret this to mean that her children have much more screen time than what they believe to be appropriate. Beata counters this by saying that even if they have the technology, it does not mean that they use it more. She is confident in her children's ability to self-monitor their screen time, which she describes as a consequence of her and her partner's "analogue" habits. In their family, Beata says, they have neither promoted screen use nor made it a forbidden activity. She thinks this is hard for other parents to understand, which causes them to criticize her family' screen time practices.

Beata's negotiation is based on her experience in the interactions – the subjective – within and outside of the family. Her sense of a motive of duty (Putnam 1990) seems to be based on confidence in her family practices, while still needing to negotiate (and contradict) the moral values she encounters. The notion of display is based on the "fundamentally social nature of family practices" (Kaufman & Grönlund 2021:214), meaning it is a concept based on social interaction. As

Beata's examples illustrate, this social nature can be both internal – towards family members – and external. Understanding Beata in terms of family display makes visible the structure, ideals and norms that she exhibits, as well as what she imagines others think of her family's screen time practices. When encountering notions of strict regulation, Beata can be understood as feeling an even greater need to display her own family's ideals, constructing her unique family in relation to broader norms around screen time and good parenthood. Lisa references this interplay between internal and externally perceived values, stating: "Even if you create your own image around it [screen time], you absorb more than you think" (Lisa, two children aged 16 and 17). To Lisa, the intersubjective can have a significant impact on the moral negotiations that occur in the household.

The notion of display solidifies the activities and ideas around screen time in relation to the parents' reflexivity towards what they understand as good parenting. The parents feel that other parents are "worse" than them – their practices do not reflect the moral values that the parents above adhere to. In this way, displays are an outward projection towards other families, parents, groups and individuals (Dermott 2016). Morality as a motive of duty becomes visible in this comparative display. For example, the way Siv and Anders imagine screen time implies that there are boundaries and limits to what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, and these reflect what they understand as good and bad parenting. When other parents display 'bad' parenting practices, this only reinforces the parents' own understanding of their good practices, which can also be related to Beata's experience. Anders continues to state that when it comes to parenting, screen time feels like "it's almost the only thing you compete around" (Anders, two children aged 6 months and 5 years). Mimmi also notes that these displays are comparative, and often not in a good way: "you might in some ways, in a very unhealthy way, compare yourself to others" (Mimmi, three children aged 13, 15 and 17). Lisa can be seen as adding to this sentiment in her interview. When she is asked about discussions about screen time with other parents, she states the following:

> Interviewer: Do you discuss this with other parents?
>
> Lisa: We do that a lot. Above all when you're older and use social media. But it can turn into this little goody-two-shoes competition. I try to stay away from those discussions. Everyone is so great. I then realize that you're just creating this image of something. […] There are many [parents] that are pretty straight forward as

well. But there are many who are very wholesome when they share […] I never go into these discussions with those kinds of people because I realize we have different opinions on things. (Lisa, two children aged 16 and 17)

Lisa notes that these discussions often relate to parents with younger children, who, to her, seem more adamant about doing the "right thing." She attributes these values to the widely held view that screen time is harmful and bad, which creates a culture of competition among parents. As she feels like an outsider during these conversations with other parents, she seemingly displays her family values in her avoidance of these discussions. This becomes central to her argument, signaling that her opinions are different from parents that she considers "full of themselves" or "goody two-shoes." In this, she displays resistance to the ideology of intensive parenting (Hays 1996) when confronted with these values (as she says, to make their family seem better than it actually is). However, in this, she places importance on her own internal moral values and those she feels are shared within her family. Resistance becomes a moral standpoint, where she rejects ideals that she perceives as self-indulgent. It is also a question where good parenting is actually perceived as 'too good,' to the point that it becomes an unattainable ideal. Albin references this when recalling a time he had coffee with another father: "And he really wanted to, like, he really wanted to tell me they got rid of the TV" (Albin, two children aged 2 months and 3 years). Actively removing screens from your life is something desirable (see Syvertsen 2020 in terms of digital disconnection), something Albin sees as being "goody two-shoes." He continues by telling me that he feels this is just based on some kind of false image of being a 'good' parent.

The comparative – and competitive – perspective again emerges in an interview with Vera and Edmund.

Vera: Today, it's more about discussions around the coffee table with other parents, if I think about my experience. Sharing stories about how it can have negative effects and how you need to be vigilant. Kind of like cautionary tales for colleagues who don't have kids who are that old yet.

Edmund: Exactly what she said. That's exactly what I do in the break room at work too. Hell, don't give in. Don't buy the phone until… until it's more regulated. Because you don't know what you're doing. (Vera & Edmund, two children aged 16)

Experiences of screen time are articulated as displays of parenthood in that the parents draw on their own histories in warning others of the potential harm of screen technologies and not properly regulating screen time. It is not only a display; it is also a *moral display* of parenthood, being both normative and an embodiment of good parenthood. The display of family – or parenthood – is dependent on social interaction in projecting "family-like relationships" (Shannon 2022:460). The display Edmund is doing is in many ways upholding what, to him, constitutes good parenting. In his resistance to introducing a mobile phone "until it is more regulated," he displays the structure of limitation and responsibility towards traditional parenting values, where children need to be protected from the harms of screen technology. Further, this can be understood as the ultimate parental motive of duty – the safeguarding of children in the face of imagined and perceived harms, which both Hays (1996) and Furedi (2008) discuss regarding the ideologies surrounding contemporary parenting. Putting this motive of duty into words, Ester states: "That's where I feel my responsibility as a parent. I feel like I can't put that responsibility on you yet. I have to be the one who is careful for you" (Ester, one child aged 8). Ester feels this is because she believes her daughter, who is eight, is going through a transformative age, one of many, as she notes. Ester negotiates the levels of independence she can allow for her daughter and imagines that she will eventually need to let go in the future. However, she still acknowledges, later in the interview, that feelings of being protective of her child will probably always be there. Protecting her child – to various degrees – is how Ester constructs her display as a responsible and good parent.

Responsibility is at the heart of why this display regarding screen time is even done. Anna reflects on how she understands her and her partners' strong parenting ideals regarding screen time: "Then again, I think we are both pretty goody-two-shoes. I think that's the bitter truth" (Anna, one child aged 6). Similar to Edmund's statements above, she takes a more restrictive stance towards the objects and practices. However, she can be understood as valuing herself in this display, referring to the evaluation as "the bitter truth." When Anna refers to herself as a goody two-shoes, this shows how negotiations around good parenthood and parenting can be very ambivalent. Being a good parent can mean engaging in practices that are not always seen as desirable, which is visible in Anna's display. Projecting a goody two-shoes persona, according to Anna, puts her at risk of being seen as irritating or annoying by other parents. These displays are reliant on the

considerable attention given to screen time, related practices and the meanings the participants experience them as having. In phenomenological terms, this form of display is a type of intentionality in that the experience of the object or phenomenon is that of the phenomenon as harmful and unreliable. As with most parents in this dissertation, these intentions are seldom determined, as Anna illustrates when stating: "Is it good or is it bad? Or is it neither good nor bad, and simply a consequence of how we live our lives today?" (Anna).

While displays become visible in social interaction – here in comparison to other parents – the interaction is still very much dependent on feedback (Finch 2007; Shannon 2022). Svante, father of a three-month-old and a two-year-old, notes: "I think when you talk to people at work and get into the subject [of screen time], I think there is a certain understatement in how much people say their kids watch television, for example" (Svante). This, as he says, is more prevalent when talking to parents of younger children. Svante experiences displays, when they occur, as being even more pronounced in families with younger children. He believes these displays are a way of "soothing one's anxiety" around screen time. His partner, Elsa, a medical technician, chimes in to say that these interactions make you feel guilty, while she imagines that other parents do the same thing as her family or "maybe even worse." Elsa feels that the display is one-sided, as she experiences that these parents neither ask about nor are interested what other families do. Elsa questions the motives, opinions and judgments of other parents, when engaging in negotiations around screen time. This questioning can be linked to paranoid parenting, which Furedi (2008) posits as a feature of contemporary parenting. The advice and opinions parents navigate in their daily lives form the basis of these questionings, which Elsa and Svante both engage in.

The notion that the displays parents encounter in their everyday life are not truthful, exaggerated or contradictory comes up in several of the interviews, as exemplified by Olof:

> Olof: I find it a bit difficult to talk to other parents about it. Because, as I said, I feel like people aren't completely honest about how much screen time they have. Or, I don't really know that. But that's the feeling I get. And I feel like I'm not entirely… […] It's hard to talk to people about it. Whether it's been a lot or a little… it feels like people underestimate the amount when they talk about it.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Olof: As I said, I think it feels like a status thing. And I don't really know why it's become that way. (Olof, one child aged 3)

Olof finds it difficult to believe what other parents report about their screen time routines and practices. As Olof says, he feels that having as little screen time as possible is a "status thing," perceiving it as something to both aspire to and display in social interactions. This could be interpreted in terms of his sense that this display is a distorted version of reality – the lived everyday of the parents in question. It is also telling of how contemporary ideals around parenthood – as unreachable standards – are constituted and reproduced through screen time. Olof's statements do not fully align with this version. While the displays cannot be taken at face value, both the display itself and the feedback are more often than not moral in character. While Olof recognizes the other parents' motives of duty, he is reluctant to believe what is being communicated. These elements of distrust in the displays become part of the normative assumptions around screen time, as Olof feels that parents' screen time practices are part of this "status." Silje continues by describing parenting as an attempt to fight against the image of the perfect parent, which sometimes means putting oneself up to impossible standards: "And then you might forget who you are and start to believe that all parents are supposed to be a certain way." While the experience is subjective, the ideals constitute what the parents face in the intersubjective life-world (wherever they emanate from).

Display, in this sense, is dependent on understanding the structural contexts – the broader value systems, relating to social class, and policies – according to which the parents act (Kaufman & Grönlund 2021). In their study on screen time and parenting in the UK, Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2018) acknowledge socio-economic contexts as a factor in screen time management, which could be interpreted as status in Olof's description (although he references this in relation to his own life-world). Furthermore, the notion that that being a good parent means having as little screen time as possible in your family is raised again later in Silje and Olof's interview, when Silje states that: "My goal is to have zero [screen time] […] I know that's impossible" (Silje). Silje and Olof continue to illustrate how these ideals become visible in their former parenting group, which they decided to leave as they felt it was too judgmental in relation to screen time:

Olof: You kind of got the sense that screens were something negative.

Interviewer: The general perception?

Olof: Yes, that was the general feeling.

Silje: If I can be a bit judgmental, they only showed the perfect side, and it felt very fake. (Silje & Olof, one child aged 3)

Status is translated as perfect and plastic – something that is not real. Silje and Olof feel that the way other parents displayed their parenthood in the parenting group was untruthful and not "real." This distrust in other displays of parenthood relies on a moral evaluation of parenthood as something imperfect. What the two parents seem to be trying to convey is that everyone knows about the cracks in the facade, but these are concealed behind image and status, creating an inauthentic display of parenthood. As Finch (2007) argues, the display is a construct of relationships meant to be understood and seen as families by others (both by the family members themselves and other groups). The parents describe the interactions in the parenting group in terms of how the other parents display a parenting situation that does not align with the reality of everyday life. The display constructs a moral parenthood that is presented as good parenthood (experienced as too good at times). Resistance to these types of perceived 'false' parenthood ideals is still reliant on the display of such a parenthood in the first place. Silje continues to describe how her own display of parenthood within the parenting group (she also explains that she left the group shortly thereafter) was experienced as an anomaly in terms of screen time practices:

There was a psychologist, and I asked her, 'What's your take on this? Is there a limit?' […] I asked in the parent group, 'Is it okay to show a little [screen time]?' 'No, I don't think so.' And she was young. So I thought she would say something else. She was as old, or as young, as us. […] But yeah, a psychologist in her thirties. And she said, 'No, I don't think you should show any at all.' […] So I thought, 'Oh, no one disagreed, and I was the only one who asked the question.' (Silje)

Silje encountered an unexpected response, as she felt the parent in the parent group (the psychologist) would share the same values because of her similar age. She states that she instead felt alone in the group as she was the only one with slightly looser, more relaxed rules on screen time. Displays and ideals are dependent on contexts; in this case, the context in which the display is acknowledged as a family-like construction. Silje's decision to leave the parent

group following the above discussion can be seen as a response to feelings that her parenting practices were not acknowledged. Her display was neither reinforced by the others in the parenting group nor understood as a practice of good parenting (quite the opposite). Instead, she was subjected to judgement and an unexpected response from the psychologist.

Along with status and images of being good parents, authenticity is also noted as an element of the moral displays of parenthood. Albin explains how he feels screen time is connected to being a good parent in terms of authenticity:

> The constant pursuit of what's genuine and authentic as a parent these days—it's part of it. It feels like there's almost this pressure for everything to be so genuine. Like you have to make everything as difficult for yourself as possible sometimes. (Albin, two children aged 2 months and 3 years)

Albin feels that the very nature of being a parent in contemporary society is about striving for authenticity – being "real." This is also connected to discourses around digital disconnect (see Albris et al. 2024), which Albin sees as a kind of 'faked' authenticity. He further states that he believes this makes people miss the social aspects of the day-to-day, as parents are preoccupied with how their children's future, how the eventually will turn out. Albin seems to reference the responsibility that parents feel to be overly attentive "to every stage of the child's emotional and intellectual development" (Hays 1996:8). This preoccupation and investment in child development are also what Lareau (2011) views as significant to middle-class parenting, something Albin seems to question. His partner Nina adds that other parents focus on trying to avoid creating "criminals or deviants," losing sight of what is happening in the moment. This presents a paradox, as screens are often also accused of colonizing the immediacy of everyday life. Screen time and the ideals around screen time are reproduced as ambivalent, where the quest for the 'real' results in a blinding focus on the 'authentic.' These discussions also reveal a certain ambivalence, as Albin relates this to his relative's screen time practices, where, according to him, the child is always completely engulfed in the screen. He situates this in relation to his own family, stating that he does not think "brief moments affect his child at all," although his child can be difficult at times.

In their statements, Albin and Nina reveal a resistance of sorts towards what is considered good parenting in contemporary society, calling it a parental "pressure" (see Furedi 2008). This can be understood as displays around screen

time that outwardly construct parenthood, particularly ideals and norms of genuine and 'authentic' parenthood. These ideals are not isolated within the family but are part of larger structures of norms and values, according to which the display is understood (Dermott & Seymor 2011). The pursuit of the authentic relates to what Wall (2022) refers to when she argues that parenting is a question of continuously increased effort, which is more prevalent in contemporary (Western) society. The motive of duty not only relates to what should be done, but what that doing strives to achieve. When asked what he means by the word authentic, Albin relates practices around screen time to other practices he sees as moral displays:

> Albin: Yeah, but I feel like it's not just about TV and screens - it's about parenting in 2023 in general. There's so much focus on the food being perfect, completely vegetarian, no sugar - it has to be like… What are those boring balls called?
>
> Nina: Date balls.
>
> Albin: Date balls! Instead of chocolate balls, and they get frozen juice instead of ice cream. […] To me, it's an attempt to be something that doesn't really exist. (Albin & Nina, two children aged 2 months and 3 years)

Albin describes the modern condition as something he feels "a bit allergic to." He also notes that this can go both ways – either parenting is about freedom and independence (where, he says, candy, soda and screens are a free-for-all) or about not "giving them [the children] anything nice." These two extremes, Albin notes, are of the same character. In his eyes, both positions are pretentious and relate to the same displays of parenthood. Either you have no rules and things still work, he says, or you have very strict rules (e.g., having birthday parties where the children are given "apples and yoghurt" instead of soda). He believes these parents are displaying similar things – a parenthood that is fake and scripted. Nina continues to say that she loves the parents who can talk openly about screen time. Usually, she says, parents only like to talk about the days without screen time.

The displays and practices are related to other notions of good parenting, where health and authenticity are intertwined. As Syvertsen (2020) argues, the digital disconnection discourse is partly about authenticity, as screen resistance is considered morally better and often makes a distinction between "real life" and life on screens. Albin illustrates this when pointing out that authentic parenting

is connected to practices of restricting screen time (and restricting other things, such as sugar). For him, this represents an ideal that does not really exist – nothing more than an imagined notion of parenthood. Like many of the parents, Albin and Nina understand the moral dimensions of screen time not as autonomous; rather, it is imbued with ideals that relate to other norms, ideas and practices. Both Albin and Nina point to the complex nature of these ideals, as they are very much situated in everyday mundane practices (screen management compared to children's snacks and eating habits). Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2018; also see Mascheroni & Zaffaroni 2023) point to the paradox of an everyday with media, as the vast opportunities presented by the technologies are subjected to the constraints of normative practices. In Albin's view, restricting screen time is, in many ways, pursuing what is imagined as authentic contemporary parenthood, such as making ice cream out of frozen juice, cooking vegetarian family dinners and eating date balls instead of chocolate balls.

Intersubjective coherence as doing good parenthood

Morality around screen time is not without context; as has been discussed throughout this chapter, ideals and values do not remain static. Idun notes how their screen time rules have become flexible when they leave her children with their grandparents:

> If you get a lot of help from your parents, you also have to be a bit kind and say, 'Yeah, you can turn on the screen if you feel it's needed.' And sometimes they feel it's needed. And then the rules might be a little different. He [the dad] tried to convince them to stick to the same strict rules we had. But I was more like, 'Just let them be.' So it's comfortable for them. (Idun, two children aged 6 moths and 4 years)

Idun feels that her partner is trying to hold on to their core family's motives of duty by asking the grandparents to keep somewhat strict rules regarding screen time. As Idun explains, the father is adamant that consistent rules should be maintained in and across other contexts, understood as beyond the "small life-world" (see Luckmann 1970) of the domestic space. Her partner can be seen as displaying the core values of his family around screen time, although Idun finds the values to be more dependent on context. Still their ideas and practices are "fluid", their extended family still "'counts' as family" (Morgan 2011:7) and to

Idun, should be encompassed by their family's 'structures'. Continuing, Idun acknowledges the grandparents' opinions on these rules, as they "thought we were pretty silly with our first child, that we were so awfully strict" (Idun). The obligations that reside within what is perceived as the domestic core can be understood as primary moral obligations. However, as Idun illustrates, these obligations need to be flexible and adaptable to other contexts when the parents themselves are not present. Ester, as a single mother, explains why she feels these obligations are her responsibility: "It's another kind of responsibility as a parent. Which it should be. Even if my mom is around a lot, she's not a parent, except to me" (Ester, one child aged 8). Ester establishes boundaries for different family practices, where those that require greater responsibility are firmly placed on her. Her mother is indeed considered family, yet not her daughter's parent. While different contexts may call for flexible rules regarding screen use and screen time, the ultimate moral responsibility seems to lie with the parents themselves. The way parenting is done takes its point of departure from what the parents understand as their 'core' family. These moral contexts pose other challenges for the parents. As Beata notes:

> [I] constantly try to make the kids aware of all the information they're exposed to, and god, it's so hard when grandma and grandpa are over […] We've had some discussions about it, and also with their paternal grandmother. I think it's really difficult for that generation to handle, because they're also kind of new to it. […] Sometimes I see my parents scrolling more than both me and [their dad] do. […] But we've said that if they're watching all those short clips—which we don't really want them to do—then we want you to be there so you can explain if there's something inappropriate, because there might be. (Beata, two children aged 8 and 11)

Beata explains how her family's screen time ideals and practices are vulnerable when the grandparents are involved. She notes that the "openness" and "conscious making" she and her partner feel is important around screen time but is hard to sustain in certain contexts. Consistency is at the heart of her statements, along with control over the screen time ideals she has strived to introduce in her family. These ideals, Beata asserts, should also apply to the extended family. The motive of duty (Putnam 1990) can be understood as "embedded in the normative framework of moral value" (Ben-Menahem 2016:227). Being normative, this framework is dependent on consistency and coherence. Beata feels that notions of

good parenthood and parenting are important and should also apply to the grandparents' practices. This also requires control, as the grandparents' screen time practices are at times deemed worse, as "they are a bit new to this," to quote Beata. Both the values of the family's practices and the extended family can be seen as dimensions in creating a sense of coherence and ontological security for the mother. Erik, who lives in rural Sweden with his two children aged three and six, notes that this coherence is often based on "presence, that has been so important" (Erik). Being present in the children's lives means being able to create coherent ideals around screen time. Beatas's notion that her children should be aware of and understand what they are experiencing on screens is further elaborated when discussing another context related to screen time:

> [T]here have been a few occasions where I've felt […] the other way around. There's a family I consider very aware, where the dad is a tech freak and works with computers and software development. For him, that's his everyday life, and he lets his son use screens in different ways, pretty much all day. And when he's with them, their rules apply. So [our child] might come home, and we've explained that we have different perspectives—it will always be like that, in life and everything. We have different circumstances, different […] opinions or experiences, and that's what you build your family on. And you just have to accept that. In one place, it might be more luxurious, so to speak, and in another, less so. And everything in between. […] His friend seems to function normally anyway. (Beata, two children aged 8 and 11)

Beata shows how other intersubjective contexts are important when discussing screen time. Differences in ideals or practices do not always elicit resistance or pose problems. As Beata notes, her understanding of the other family's values, norms and contexts (the dad being a tech freak, for example) shows confidence that her family's values will not be disrupted. Beata is not alone in this approach; however, most parents feel this is not as easy. Other participants have noted that the intersection of different values can be problematic. Idun, for example, sees this when her children are at their cousin's house, where she feels that screen time is constant. She questions the wisdom of this approach, noting that she is afraid that it will "spill over" to her children, more specifically her older child of four. Anna expresses a similar argument in that she feels that other families have had a negative influence on her child, particularly when he visits their homes. However, she states that parenting is something individual and independent, saying: "Even

though we don't think we have the right to control each other's parenting, of course, we still want to protect our child" (Anna, one child aged 6). Other motives of duty should be independent, as understood through Anna's statement, while they sometimes need to be evaded. Therefore, doing good parenthood (see Sparrman et al. 2016) at times means safeguarding the internal values of the family.

Conclusion

The moral dimension around the screen time phenomenon is part of the parents' negotiations in areas of contestation, negotiation and consensus. This becomes visible in understanding the ways in which the parents have certain motives of duty, which are related to what they believe is good (or bad) parenting. While these positions are negotiated, there is often a notion of contextual objectivity to these moral issues. To use Finch's (2007) notion of display, this motive of duty aids in showing how the parents here display morals in terms of doing moral displays, which is especially notable in their comparisons to other parents. Display is a practice within everyday life, and the parents discussed here are doing and reflecting on this parenting display in a mundane setting. Putting your children to bed using YouTube videos is still a mundane task, as is using screens while getting ready for school. However, these are seen and experienced as moral issues related to valued practices. As one parent notes when stating that the family reads books instead of using screens before bed, they are "at least not as bad" as the families who use screens. Some of these displays are actively resisted by other parents, who note that others are striving towards a 'fake' authenticity. This is noted when parents seemingly brag about their screen-free time or the absence of screens in their home. While these are only a few concrete examples, the focus has been on the moral negotiations around the displays, showing how screen time as a phenomenon is predominantly moral in character.

In discussing screen time and morality in the domestic setting, the parents seem to operate according to a scale of 'good' and 'bad' parenting. This includes the reflexivity involved in valuing one's own parenting. This reflexivity is visible in parents who dub themselves "lazy," or in the metaphors they use to describe everyday life and screen time. These are not absolute values, although they may be perceived as such. Instead, they are negotiated as part of what the parents believe to be good parenting regarding screen time. In this, the parents reproduce

values around contemporary parenting as focused on the long-term development of the child, or the importance of being 'present' in child-rearing practices. Screen time, as the parents discuss, often becomes a hinderance in everyday life, at times functioning as a 'cheat code' for parenting. Feelings of inadequacy are tied to these discussions, which rely on discourses around what modern-day parenting, as norms based on middle-class values, should look like. While the parents engage in a range of negotiations, when they display their parenthood and discuss the displays of others, their values are more absolutist. Other parents may be perceived as portraying a false or distorted image of their parenthood, or the parents' own practices are put in relation to others – constructing one as good and one as bad (or more or less good or bad). The moral comparison that is made in the display is then both a more explicit exhibition of what the parents imagine as good parenthood, as well as a yardstick for their own practices and morality.

Mapping the participants' negotiations around screen time also reveals the all-encompassing nature of the associated values and ideals. These are not arbitrary ideals – they are exhibited as norms relating to highly conscious, educated and value-conscious middle-class parents. The ideals include connotations, points of contact and contexts that relate explicitly to screen time and extend beyond the practices and values around the phenomenon. As Hays (1996) describes intensive parenting, the norms are based in unreachable ideals, putting immense pressure on the parents to do the 'right' thing. The parents discuss parental authenticity, status, moral comparisons, good parenthood and distrust in other parents self-reported screen practices in conjunction with the everyday phenomenon of screen time. These statements and reflections have notable moral dimensions. The moral dimensions of screen time, and how they are perceived to influence everyday life, are central to the negotiations the participants engage in during the interviews. Using practice-based perspectives, such as doing and displaying parenthood, not only emphasizes the intersubjective contexts in which the parents find themselves but also reveals how the parents value and create meaning as they construct their parenthood, more often than not in terms of morality. This means that both the family as a contextual site of experience and parenthood as an identity are placed at the forefront in the analysis. This phenomenon encompasses the parents' subjective experiences as intending screens and screen time in ways related to morality and their perceived motives of duty.

In many ways, applying Putnam's (1990) arguments about the perceived dichotomy of facts and values helps deconstruct what the parents' experience as true, good and coherent. In this way, rationality and morality are inseparable and highly dependent on context (Timmons 1991). In this chapter, this is visible when the parents express their motives of duty – what they feel is the morally right course of action around screen time. The notion of good parenthood is as much based on rational and perceived objective values as far more ephemeral dimensions, such as emotions. The moral comparisons that are visible in the parents' displays are based on these dimensions. Internalized and externalized values and perceived truths form what can be described as imagined good parenthood, which is consolidated within the parents' discussions of screen time. The subjective experience and the intersubjective are then constitutive of each other. This does not mean that the parents remain unaffected by discourses outside of these spheres, which is an argument that will be further explored in the next chapter.

7. Looking out: Screen time and its horizons

Up until now, this dissertation has dealt with the imaginaries of screen time and how the parents' practices and experiences around these imaginaries can be understood. This has mainly focused on what Benita Luckmann (1970) calls the "small life-worlds of modern man" (in which both the domestic space and parenthood itself could be categorized) and has not dealt with the horizons of these small life-worlds to any significant extent (at least in analysis). This chapter examines the often diffuse and grey areas of everyday life with screen time, where parents attempt to navigate the different horizons of their life-world. The first part of the chapter deals with the recommendations and broader narratives of screen time in mass media or online sources (amongst other sources), thus examining the negotiations the parents have in relation to public narratives and discourses in the parents' everyday. This section deals with the way in which the parents navigate their daily life while relating to the broader narrative that is screen time (in the form of state or expert recommendations, debates, etc.). The second section takes a closer look at the horizons of the unknown – that is, how the parents imagine the future regarding screen time or what they imagine this future will look like.

Idyllic ideals: Negotiating the horizons of screen time

In the previous chapter, part of the discussion was focused on how feelings of shame and inadequacy contributed to how the moral aspects of screen time were imagined in the parents' daily life. Although the parents' statements alluded to how these feelings were connected to other, larger questions, such as institutional screen time recommendations, these issues were not explored in depth. In the interviews, parents were asked about the source of negative feelings related to screen time. Svante responded:

> For me, there's this whole recommendation that no screens should be used before a child is one year old. I mean, it's a government agency, and I trust government recommendations. That I find tough. And then it feels like there's this vague portrayal of the family as idyllic. But I really struggle to pinpoint where this idyllic image even comes from. Yeah, like some idyllic vision where, yes, we watch *Bolibompa*[65] at five o'clock and then it's fine. (Svante, two children aged 3 months and 2 years)

Svante explains how they feel that recommendations are very difficult to navigate, even though he notes that they are issued by the government and he trusts state agencies. Both Svante and Elsa, Svante's partner, do not feel that screen time is a major issue in their everyday life with their two young children. However, Elsa notes that whenever they use screens, there is a nagging sense of shame. When asked if there is anything she would want to change in terms of screen time, Elsa says that she is quite happy with the way things work at the moment. Even though she experiences feelings of shame, she says that the current situation is "acceptable." Elsa and Svante further position these recommendations against the reality of everyday life, in which screen time makes up a substantial part: "The everyday is sometimes just about trying to get through; it's not always super easy" (Svante). To this, Elsa adds that she would not have been able to be a good parent without screens. She means that her children's screen time can provide much needed respite, allowing her to get other things done around the house.

There are several opposing views and critiques presented here, along with a certain sense of ambivalence. As Sandberg et al. (2024a) note, parents present "complex and often conflicted" views when discussing screen time. Recommendations represent an ideal to Svante and Elsa, an ideal based on the idyllic family life. They perceive screen time recommendations to mean that children should have just a half hour of children's programs early in the evening, even though this ideal is also described as "vague." The parents question these unrealistic ideals, which they feel are being imposed on them (see Furedi 2008), noting that screen time is also a way to simply get through everyday life. As Elsa puts it, screen time is also a resource she uses to "withstand" all the things that a parent needs to get done. This is even more clearly expressed as Elsa continues to relate her fears around screen time: "You're inevitably going to fuck up your kids in some way, and I just

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[65] Swedish children's program on public service television

hope that this won't be the thing that turns out to be the worst" (Elsa, two children aged 3 months and 2 years). Failing as a parent is inevitable, at least to some extent, and minimizing this failure becomes the struggle of the everyday. In this argument, it also becomes clear that the parents often blame themselves for these failures (as previously noted by Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2018; Sandberg et al. 2024a). Albin expresses the same kind of ideas as Elsa and Svante:

> The general attitude, I think, is that screens aren't good, period, and that... I don't know, I read somewhere that children shouldn't be exposed to any screens before the age of three or something like that. When they're two years old, and it feels impossible in a normal home. Then you'd almost... I don't know how you could even do it. [...] My impression is that it's only possible in a very academic and proper household. (Albin, two children aged 2 months and 3 years)

Albin calls the recommendation that children under the age of two have no screen exposure "impossible" in a normal home. He expresses the notion that only an academic or proper household would have enough knowledge and resources to adhere to these unrealistic recommendations. Similar to Svante, Albin questions the wisdom of the perceived demands that institutional screen time recommendations place on parents. His skepticism is not only in line with Furedi's (2008) notion of paranoid parenting; he also notes the kind of resources (specifically in terms of knowledge) that must be available for a family to adhere to such strict recommendations. Albin seems to reference certain classed values, notably middle-class, where parents are equipped with enough time, knowledge and discipline to implement government recommendations. When asked about how he feels about screen time recommendations, Martin says: "What you said about ideals, there is a lot to that. How you're supposed to be. [...] Then there's a fear in everything you do, because you're never really sure" (Martin, three children aged 4, 8 and 11). To Martin, the ideals are not only something unrealistic and deterministic, they are also sometimes even restraining. As he notes, you are never sure if you are parenting the 'correct' way, because the outcomes are opaque and largely indeterminable for the parents (see Furedi 2008).

Many of the parents note how these "horizons" (see Schütz 1970; 2002; Husserl 1995) have an impact on their life-world and how they act in it.[66] Olof explains,

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[66] The concept of horizons includes what can be understood as discourses, as external opinions, systems of value and meanings (de Cleen et al 2021). Public opinions on screen time, for

"everyone talks about how harmful and how bad it is, then you have that with you" (Olof, one child aged 3). Britta also expresses that who "everyone" refers to and how all this knowledge around screen time is acquired is not entirely clear. Olof can be understood as describing a horizon where there is a common consensus on how screen time is imagined as harmful and bad. Britta also expresses these common narratives: "I think it's harmful if it gets excessive" (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4). Ludvig, father of a fifteen-year-old son still living at home, also notes how these norms come through in public discourse and his resistance to them: "They really want to make it out that everything about screens is bad, but that's not really what I believe" (Ludvig, three children aged 15, 22 and 25). Gerd, mother of an eleven-year-old and a fourteen-year-old, states that she is not quite sure if screen time is harmful. She discusses children's brain development, noting that it may be a threat to this development as people's brains are not "fully developed until they are 23 or 24" (Gerd). Gerd then situates the discussion within a certain scientific context, asking if it is really wise to put children in front of screens when they are only one year old. However, she notes that this is still an opaque horizon: "In the long run I'm not sure what it will do to us, but I guess we'll find out how it all affected us in the future" (Gerd).

In the parents' experiences of screen time, there is a relatable discourse that is "brought along" in everyday life. The parents' life-worlds are made up of these realities. There is something to relate to: Other parents and experts, recommendations and general opinions (such as mass media outlets). While exactly which news outlets, other parents or exactly which voices are considered is an interesting question, the object of this enquiry focuses on how the parents navigate these opaque experiences in their everyday lives. This encompasses how the parents' negotiations materialize or are mediated, shaped and constituted through their agency. Josefin expresses the contexts of these diffuse situations when she is asked where her ideas about screen time come from: "I wonder where I read that. It could have been like a parenting book or something, I don't really know." (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9). Nonetheless, as horizons, these public discourses and recommendations inevitably shape the subjective

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example, are part of the horizons of the life-world in that they are experienced as something in the distance, often ephemeral and not entirely determined. In this dissertation, the focus on horizons is not on meaning per se; instead, it is on the way meaning is produced through agents mediating and negotiating the horizons they see as part of their lifeworld.

experience, remaining points of reference and a moral consensus that informs the schemes of reference in the individuals' life worlds. While the experience is subjective, the references (as horizons) are part of a "shared cognitive schema" (Chambers 2016). This schema is dependent on how the world in which the parents act is imagined, with all its norms and ideals.

When talking to the parents in this study, many of the negotiations and navigations around screen time are based on diffuse and unclear ideas and ideals. As has already been described, the parents note that this is based on unrealistic ideals, unknown futures, opaque horizons and attitudes towards screen time as harmful. The parents try to make sense of a narrative that is abstract and based on largely unattainable norms. Schütz (1973) explains how an object's "determinateness" relies on a familiarity and knowledge of said object in experiencing it (Schütz & Luckmann 1973:151). Knowledge and familiarity are not only subjective properties, they rely on the objects and their "historical" and relative" possibilities (Scüutz & Luckmann 1973:151). This relationship must be accounted for when attempting to understand how an individual, or group of individuals, 'determines' objects in a subjective context. The practices and parental competencies discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 are reliant on this. The parents here, for example, have drawn on their experiences as aggregations of their ideals, values, experiences and standpoints on, for example, public discourses around screen time. Their experience is wholly subjective in the phenomenological sense; however, they draw on knowledge that they have acquired in their daily life, much of which is shared with others who experience the same objects (but with their own subjective experiences). As noted, this can have consequences for parents.

> I think it can often be the case that if you stress yourself out, you create further stress and then maybe feel like a bad parent. And if you then hear that from other parents, who may not share my personality type, it can probably be very difficult. So in that way, it's quite nice to have a personality where I don't care about [those opinions] that much. (Ludvig, three children aged 15, 22 and 25)

Ludvig discusses how these public discourses create extra stress for parents, as they encounter them in relation to other parents, as mediated through them. He has always been a bit against these discourses, expressing that he often feels he goes "against the stream." Ludvig has a rather unique entry point to the screen time debate, which is not shared by many of the other parents. In "going against the

stream," his horizons include what he is going against – what he is resisting. The "stream" – those who feel anxiety when it comes to screen time – represents ideas that Ludvig holds about other parents and individuals, rather than concrete groups of people with whom he continuously interacts. Schütz (1973) describes the subjective experience as dependent on these horizons of the life-world, what is imagined as related to specific phenomena. The basis in understanding this is in what knowledge an individual draws on in relation to an experience. In the negotiations around screen time, the determinedness expressed by the individual, as well as how this relates to the subjective individual, is imperative to the ability to understand and empirically explain the parents' experiences. Martin explains how his experience of screen time has very diffuse horizons.

> It's not something that just comes naturally. There's no authority saying, 'Hey, here's how you should handle screen time with your kids,' so you have to figure it out yourself. And then you don't know. Maybe the best solution is to give them free time and opportunities because that's what life will look like. Or maybe it should be limited. No idea. And you have to live with that uncertainty somehow. But with it come the moral aspects as well. I find it tricky to navigate. (Martin, three children aged 4, 8 and 11)

These diffuse horizons, as Martin explains, have many different dimensions. There is no concrete institution that imposes legal restrictions on screen time; instead, the full responsibility for this falls on the parents. Jeffrey (2021b) recognizes this in her study on parents and media use and the connection to neoliberal discourses of individual parental responsibility. Martin and his family are left to their own devices, and the parents must shoulder all the blame for the negative consequences of screen use. Still, the actual horizons, which are closely connected to the subjective experience, remain as diffuse as any of the recommendations or external opinions are perceived. Parents such as Martin are left to navigate their everyday life through on-going and past experiences. Martin emphasizes individual practices that, as Willet and Wheeler (2021) argue, "parents are expected to follow as responsible citizens" (2021:723). This remains the situation in which he understands the unknown future effects of screen time and screen use, as previous parents have also expressed in the beginning of this chapter. This constitutes a grey area, characterized by diffuse and often abstract realms of experience. What comes into focus is how the parents mediate social norms through their everyday experiences and practices. Screen time, as a phenomenon,

carries with it a multitude of values, ideals and ideas, but it is in what the parents draw on from their own experiences that any concrete empirical discussion can take place.

> There's very little emphasis on how great it is that kids are in front of screens, like, 'Oh, isn't it fantastic.' No, that hardly ever comes up; instead, it's more from obesity doctors, pediatric obesity specialists, and that physiotherapist. In that regard, it's much more about fear and propaganda. It's not actually propaganda, because it's their research, so of course, it's valid. You have to consider that too. But it's very unbalanced. Or maybe it isn't, I don't know other research that presents the opposite view. So, you don't really know. (Anna, one child aged 6)

It is apparent that the way screen time is conceptualized as an abstraction here carries the properties of something almost inherently 'bad.' Anna's statement is telling in that she defines screen time as "influenced by dominant social discourses" (Mascheroni & Zaffaroni 2023). Anna even goes as far as calling it "propaganda," something she quickly nuances. She relates these ideals to her own experiences when her now six-year-old son was a toddler. Anna regrets not being more relaxed around screen time, stating that: "We were also pretty wholesome and got pretty much burnt out because of that" (Anna). She feels that she and her partner shouldn't have given, as she says, "two thousand percent" in their child-rearing. Anna further criticizes herself and her practices, saying that it would have made things much easier on her family if she had gotten off "her high horse." As much as she expresses that this might be the right way to go, she admits that it is very hard, as she feels she is influenced by social norms and ideals. This is inevitable, she concludes, as one "does not live in a vacuum" (Anna). Anna is negotiating the ideology of intensive parenting, where the immense pressures of parenting can become untenable, as they reach much further than simply emotional responses towards children (Hays 1996).

Frank, a father of a six-year-old daughter, says that "everyone agrees that you want to limit screen time, everyone says that, like the majority" (Frank). In his statement, there is an imagined "everyone" who all seemingly agree that screen time needs to be managed and minimized. Frank imagines a shared, collective aggregation of ideals and norms, as do most parents in this dissertation. When talking about screen time with the parents, a relatively common example emerges that is also heard frequently in debates around media technology and its presupposed 'proper' uses and ideals. These debates are often focused on the

negative aspects and practices of managing screen time in the everyday.[67] The parents in the study are attempting to navigate this everyday, while relying on different strategies to find their way.[68] Thus, the parents' movement from one point to the next in an everyday life full of obstacles, considerations, imagined ideals and imaginary practices draws on these accumulated experiences. Nonetheless, all these approaches to screen time fall within the overarching narrative to which they relate and are perceived by the parents.

> I think it's a bit about moderation, which society in general is pretty bad at nowadays. It's so damn 'either-or.' So, either it's no screen time, or it's total freedom. I think it's about finding a balance, you know, to live an ordinary life like we did… in the 90s. We don't need to make it so damn complicated. […] Things have changed, but at the same time, we don't need to change so much that we end up going back to the 1800s just to have a nice family life. (Albin, two children aged 2 months and 3 years)

Once again, Albin discusses the way in which he relates his everyday to a broader narrative around screen time. Albin expresses this through his discussion on the perceived strict guidelines of screen time narratives. He feels these narratives "complicate" the everyday of his own family, failing to offer a middle ground between no screen time at all and unlimited screen use. The middle ground is a remedy for an idealized notion that essentially calls for a screen-free everyday, which he describes as going "back to the 1800s" to be able to be realized. Albin's narrative around this also provides two other main considerations. First, the broader narratives are seldom very clear – there can be (and often are) multiple ways of understanding these discourses. Where these narratives come from is not always obvious in the interviews, however, they still form an imagined mode of conduct. This mode of conduct is drawn on from inter-linked experiences as "categories and common-sense constructs that are accumulated over time from lived experience, interactive discourse and from simply navigating the social

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[67] The management of screen time in terms of practices is discussed in Chapter 4.

[68] In this sense, the particular perspective could be understood in part as de Certeau's (1984) distinction of strategies and tactics, the way everyday practices (tactics) are a form of resistance to the grander narratives (strategies), which are "places of power," to quote de Certeau. However, the parents' discussions around their practices are not always forms of resistance, and because of this, "negotiations" is a much more fitting term to describe these relationships.

world" (Elster 2017:275). Whether this comes from government recommendations, interactions with other parents or listening to experts in mass media, the overarching 'proper' mode of practice remains a reference point. As Albin says, he feels he needs to find a way to live a "normal life," which has both nostalgic and idealized overtones.

Second, everyday experience and horizons are both part of the perceived ideals and norms around screen time, relating to certain modes of conduct and the actual practices of the parents. As Albin states, this includes how technology intrudes into the idealized everyday life and complicates it. Society as a whole and his daily on-goings lack moderation – the balance has been disturbed. How screen time as a phenomenon is experienced becomes both a point of reference and something that is constituted by everyday practices. Giddens (1984) calls this "reflexive monitoring" a "chronic feature of everyday action" (1984:5). However "fragmented" these experiences are (Mannell 2017:43), they rely both on how screen time is imagined and how it manifests in everyday life. In relation to the horizons of the life-world, practices are movement and navigation – a traversal through daily life that takes in the perspectives discussed above. The horizons these parents experience – where the idealized construct of everyday life exists – are negotiated in terms of the ideals of family life, management of technology uses, fluid and adaptable rules, responsibility and trust.

The horizons of limitation: Knowledge and determination

The fragmentation within many of the parents' negotiations are "indeterminate situation[s]" that they attempt to turn into "determinate one[s]" (Schütz 1970:111). To make the uncertain and unclear into something that can be considered coherent in their daily life is something that many of the parents strive to achieve. Some parents declare a very pronounced determinateness when discussing screen use in their family's daily life. As Josefin states: "We know that it's not good for children. But we do it. I do it too. But we know that for young children, it's really not good." (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9). She negotiates the values that she has encountered through her interaction and experience with the horizons of her life-world. Again, screen time is seen as something 'bad,' and this value is taken for granted. While Josefin relies on this "fact" that "we all know," she still allows screen use in her family's everyday life. Frank shares the same sentiment when he declares that his family is very relaxed in terms of rules

and limitations, though screen time is often an exception: "But, of course, not a lot of screen time, that's of course not okay" (Frank, one child aged 6). These types of ambivalences are often present in the mediatory process of the parents when conveying their values and ideals. The ideals around screen time are taken for granted, seemingly experienced as objective, as noted by the parents, who often state that perceived excessive or harmful use is "of course" not appropriate. While this may seem straightforward in some cases, other parents emphasize the deep ambivalences that exist within these negotiations.

> It's simply fundamentally difficult to decide what's right and wrong in about a billion different areas. I mean, I can't even! Is it more important to be eco-friendly or to think about health? And are those the same thing? And how do I know if someone like Agnes Wold[69] is saying, 'No, no, calm down, none of it matters,' or someone else... Then a report comes along with, you know, reasonably credible sources… in terms of trustworthiness and all that. Sometimes, it feels like you need a PhD to understand things. (Mimmi, three children aged 13, 15 and 17)

Mimmi experiences the practices around screen time as indeterminate and the ambivalences are based on several questions, often dichotomic in nature. She continues to address that she does not see the negative effects of screen time as becoming visible, even in this generation. Even though she feels that it may be "a hundred years" until we see the ultimate outcome of society's response to screen time, she still has ambivalent feelings around the phenomenon in the present. She states that she often wavers between feeling down about the situation and feeling like too much energy is put into the issue. As her children are teenagers, Mimmi is aware that she might feel different if she had younger children. Noting how important the children's contexts are in her own everyday experiences, she references a friend who has a lot of issues with her child's screen time. Mimmi calls screen time the "quick fix" of daily life (noting this is sometimes necessary to provide some parental respite), while still noting that children often get "anesthetized" by screens. Through this horizon of her life-world, Mimmi relates both to her own experiences and the larger problem of screen time in contemporary society. However, she closes with a more optimistic outlook: "We

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[69] A famous Swedish professor of microbiology who frequently appears in mass media discussions around health, with often quite provocative opinions.

[as a society] handle all kinds of things, and of course, we sometimes get a bit warped and weird, but we usually manage to solve it somehow" (Mimmi).

In Mimmi's experience, she herself is accountable for processing recommendations and public opinions, a task she often feels she is not equipped to do. Based on hegemonic values, and dependent on middle-class resources (Fævelen et al. 2023), Mimmi's perceived 'best' practice (the position of the 'good' parent) can be understood as unattainable, as are the long-term societal effects. This is true of many of the parents in this study. While many of them strive toward these unattainable 'goals' of child development, the horizons are constantly present, though at differing distances. Both their negotiations and practices are impacted by these horizons (see Chapters 5 and 6). Mimmi draws on comparisons to environmental and health dichotomies to describe the way in which these horizons make navigation in the life-world difficult, at times near impossible (as she clearly states). Mimmi views the pressure around parenting as a cultural and societal issue, with screen time being an exemplification of these issues. Being a 'good' parent involves these pressures (to be boundlessly invested in child-rearing) as 'common sense' (Hays 1996), which becomes apparent in Mimmi's comparison to her friend. Adding to the notion that horizons of screen time are opaque and unclear, Mimmi does not position the horizons with everyday practices, but within the shifting horizons in the life-world. Simply put, certain horizons are clearer or more opaque, closer or more distant, depending on what experiences and negotiations they are related to. Health aspects are sometimes more prevalent in screen time discussions, while at other times, as Mimmi states, she perceives these issues will likely be "solved" in the future. Her notion of these horizons are that they are somewhat contradictory, difficult to see clearly and demand specialized knowledge, which makes navigation around the phenomenon very demanding.

Mimmi is processing both her course of action and the internalized values that rely on the horizons she perceives in the life-world. Schütz (1970) argues that knowledge is central to experience. However, experiences feature "zones of distinctness and vagueness, of clarity and obscurity, of precision and ambiguity" (Schütz 1970:74). Mimmi draws on questions of who to trust, as well as her perceived lack of knowledge in who to trust, which leads to feelings of inadequacy. While she knows there is something to trust, it is not clear who or what that is. Her negotiation therefore remains in a grey area. The horizons are at different

distances and states of visibility depending on context and "movement" through the life-world. As Mimmi states: "there is so much different advice that it's not easy to understand and comprehend." Distance is also present in Mimmi's statement, as she feels screen time is such a new phenomenon that it will take generations before we see the effects. In many ways, the concept of a horizon both explains the actual horizon that is 'seen' (for example public discourse) and the relationship between the horizon and the experience itself. The internalization of what is 'seen' is part of the negotiations and to some extent explains where the parents' feelings of guilt, insecurity and inadequacy emanate from (see Chapter 6). Horizons, experiences and practices constitute the complex negotiations that take place in the domestic space. Albin and Nina, who are parents of two children aged 2 months and 3 years, discuss this as follows:

> Albin: So maybe it's this conscience, like Nina mentioned, that makes you feel like you want to limit it. But I don't necessarily think it's that harmful. […] So it's this kind of mix of societal pressure and our own thoughts, and my own experience with my own family.

> Nina: I also think it's the debate around it that makes you feel guilty. (Nina & Albin)

Albin notes that he does not feel that screen time is that dangerous, but still feels a need to limit it. Limiting is linked to his conscience, which is in turn part of how he understands the horizons of what is expected of him as a parent when it comes to screen time. It is, as Albin describes a "mix" of ideas, ideals and experiences that have an impact on the negotiations of his everyday life. He also relates this to his own upbringing, saying that he himself watched "a crapload of TV" and still turned out fine. The nature of this argument and experience becomes ambivalent, as emotions are seemingly at the heart of why this approach to limiting screen time should be enacted. Rationality and emotion seem to go against each other as Albin negotiates the perceived effects (which he does not really buy into) and the societal pressure that led to his guilty conscience (which makes him feel obligated to limit his children's screen use). Limiting is therefore based on both emotion (feelings of guilt) and more rational negotiations (adapting societal discourses). Nina seconds this and cites the public debates as the culprit behind her guilty conscience. Still, she notes later in the interview that she believes screen time does have *some kind* of negative effect. Here, ambivalence regarding

why restrictive practices should even be put in place is based on how the parents negotiate the horizons of recommendations and public opinion. Anders, father of two young children aged six months and five, shares his sentiment in similar ways when noting that even though he feels that screen time is properly handled in his domestic life, "there's something in society that's always gnawing at you." (Anders). Parents' insecurities, based on the ever-present feeling that they might be doing something 'wrong' (see Furedi 2008), are the result of overly opaque horizons whose presence is nevertheless felt (at times closer, other times more in the distance).

Many of the parents negotiate, experience and form opinions around the perceived effects of screen time. These opinions are often framed as horizons – as opinions outside of their immediate reality – but not all are determined (Schütz 1970) as clearly as others. Frida articulates this uncertainty when asked why she feels screen time needs to be limited in her everyday life.

> I think it's a bit dangerous for society to become too digitalized. […] So I don't think we're better off with too much screen time and all the mental health issues in society. I think all the social media and all the screens, all the digitalization, is a contributing factor to people feeling bad. But that's just my opinion. I don't think all this digitalization is so great. (Frida, three children aged 6, 9 and 11)

Frida expresses the view that digitalization is something almost inherently bad. This is very much a technological perspective and is expressed in many of the other interviews in relation to the horizons of screen time. Astrid, expresses the same view: "I think it's really too much screen, too many screens […] it's really a tragic development" (Astrid, three teenagers aged 15, 16 and 18). Screen technology and its uses are often seen as the culprits, so to speak, behind many modern-day ailments, such as poor psychological health and general health issues. This is a notable argument presented in relation to digital detox and disconnect (see Syvertsen 2020), which positions digital media as overly pervasive in the digital age. Frida makes this association almost immediately when asked what she sees as the problems of screen time. In this respect, she feels that the horizons are actually quite close. Frida also notes how this has social implications, discussing how her family might have better quality time without screens. While she feels her family is already quite social and close, the quality of this time could be better. Of course, she recognizes that she alone cannot solve all of society's problems, but these horizons are imagined as part of the problem.

As Schütz (1970) describes, "problems need to be solved by our thought and the goals to be attained by our actions" (1970:111). Both mothers view technology and health in society as the main problem, while the goal for Frida is to have screen time "work," to make it less of an everyday struggle and source of conflict. She formulates this later in the interview as: "There was much less nagging, and the kids became much more creative when there were much stricter limits." (Frida, three children aged 6, 9 and 11). Frida's practices, in terms of much "tougher limitations," are bound to both the ideas around technology and to everyday experiences. Frida perceives this causality as forming a better daily environment for her children – one that is more creative. Dermott (2016) also notes that within the practices of good parenting in contemporary Nordic societies, creativity is among the ideals that parents often note as important to promote and help flourish. These "tropes" (Dermott 2016:142) are seen as almost must-be references in how parents position themselves in relation to good parenting. When the parents argue that creativity should be one of these tropes, they are validating the notion as important to good parenting. As Dermott (2016) notes, this is at times a prerequisite in the validation of parenting being done 'right.' The parents relate the validation of creativity, health and the child's psychological development to that of stricter limitation, showing how these issues are bound to the child's perceived freedom when untethered from the screen.

Structures of ideals,[70] such as recommendations, only provide a framework in which thinking and experiences can occur. It is only in this way that mediation can occur through agents, exemplified by Frida's and many of the other parents' statements in this chapter. Frida shows, through her reflection and action, how the different dimensions of the life-world – the horizons and the realm of experience – are not autonomous in any sense. What she sees as an issue in society as a whole is visible in her reflexivity through "mediatory mechanism[s] that link actor and society"[71] (Elster 2017:275), which are translated into certain lines of thought and actions in her everyday life. She has also seen an improvement through this management, which she later describes as a recipe for doing "the right thing." Yet, the distinction between context and acting within it is crucial.

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[70] Understanding structure here as a "place of power" (de Certeau, 1984) as recommendations make certain claims and come from institutions.

[71] Emphasis in original.

These mediations are reliant on the parents' experiences, as the intersubjective context and the subjective are parts of the same process. In Frida's statements, the digitalization of society, mental health, limitation and creativity are all part of her negotiations around screen time, reproducing these systems of value in her mediation of them. Creativity is also at stake in Kristina's concerns regarding screen time when she proclaims that "it feels like it sort of kills creativity" (Kristina, two children aged 6 months and 3 years). Kristina and Stefan, parents of two young children, express their concern that screens are "self-playing toys" that pacify rather than inspire. Kristina feels that screens often "turn something off" in her child's head. She continues to connect this to her own experiences of her own creativity. Since she has become a parent, she feels that she cannot engage in, for example, reading in the same way she could before. This is a loss, she tells me, and she is determined to ensure this does not happen to her children. As she says, this is "something I really want to give to them." Kristina's parenting practices are based in passing on her own interests and her own ideals around creativity. As has been discussed, Kristina cannot entirely determine the outcomes: "I don't have the answer, if this is better […] but it feels better in my gut" (Kristina).

What becomes apparent is how values, ideals and norms become connected through this process, and how complex this negotiation is in reality. The values and norms around creativity are also connected to middle-class values, which are promoted by the parents in various, laborious and intensive ways (see Lareau 2011). Across the interviews, the parents express this as encouraging creative activities that negate the effects of screen time, including (depending on the child's age) building with wooden blocks, making music, reading books and drawing by hand. This negotiation exists in one of "a variety of small universes of existence" (Luckmann 1970:587), which is related to parenting as an everyday practice (which emanates in the limitation of screen use), as well as a problem context (the increased digitalization of society, which causes issues in parenting). The connection is made in the experiences and determined knowledge of the parents above: the digitalization of society is analogous to the threat to their children's creativity as a "scheme of interpretation" (Schütz 1970:75). As screens become more prevalent, more arenas for hindering child development (e.g. creative skills) arise.

Kristina also presents a pragmatic dimension in her argument that this issue can, at least in part, be solved by practices of limitation. Limitation here is a duality, as Frida, Kristina and Stefan all believe that excessive screen use also limits their children's creativity. Britta has similar arguments: "My fear is […] that you replace the creative process of playing with being just fed with impressions" (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4). Britta seemingly understands the use of screens as something far more passive than the perceived activeness of "playing." The different notions of limitation are central to their negotiations in several ways. Pernilla notes that limiting is crucial to her child-rearing approach: "I think it's nice, I mean, the reason I want to limit screen time is that I want my kids to develop other skills in some way." (Pernilla, three children aged 4, 8 and 11). Screen time is seen as limiting these skills (whatever they may be).

Resistance, temporality and morality

The horizons are both a backdrop to the everyday and part of the conditions in which daily life takes place. As constructs of cognition, they limit and make possible, as has been discussed above. As the boundaries of a "small universe" (see Luckmann 1970), this creates limits and reference points; however, it does not mean that the horizons cannot be resisted or questioned. Ideals make up the broader theme in this backdrop, while not always having to be explicitly articulated. When asked how she feels about recommendations, Britta reflects on the way they are formulated and presented, which she does as a form of resistance.

> I'm skeptical of recommendations that are so specific by the minute. Like, it would be fine to watch TV for 59 minutes, but at 61 minutes, it's suddenly a disaster. Instead, our philosophy, or mine, which we share here, is – what does the phone replace? What could we be doing instead of the phone? Or, I say phone, but any kind of screen. And if the phone replaces going out and sledding, then that's a problem. (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4)

Drawing on a sense of rationality, Britta questions recommendations concerning screen time duration, arguing that the right amount of time cannot be calculated exactly. She resists the notion that screen time is dependent on very precise recommendations. While she resists the forms of the limitations, her negotiation contains a way of formulating the limitation in terms of replacement. If screen time replaces time that is reserved for other activities, such as going sledding, then

it becomes an issue for Britta. While her questioning of the recommendations is done in relation to the horizons of her life-world, her negotiation is within her immediate reality. She 'sees' the horizons of harm and "quantity time" (Christensen 2002), as there is a danger that screen time will replace activities that are important to her, such as sledding. Luckmann (1970) discusses that while knowledge about the broader contexts in which we as individuals exist are indeed within our perception, they are not necessary for understanding what is close to us within that context. Britta may not know, or even care, what effect one minute of excess screen time will have on her children (in her statement, that minute does not matter). What she does, however, is relate to contexts of what the phone or other types of screens replace – what they steal time from. Idun formulates her thinking in a similar way, stating that: "They'll become good people anyway. It doesn't depend on whether they watch TV for too long one day or not." (Idun, two children aged 6 months and 4 years). These negotiations illustrate how deterministic guidelines or discourses are resisted, instead placed within the everyday – the "small life-world" of the parents.

Everyday life within the household as a parent is a small life-world in that it is "small, comprehensible and knowable"[72] (1970:589), and this constitutes a space of immediate knowledge (among other small life-worlds, such as working from home). Britta continues to explain the way in which she feels screen time takes away from other, more important, activities: "Have you been outside, have you been active? Have you taken care of your chores, hygiene and eaten well? Then the screen is fine" (Britta, two children aged 2 and 4). Limitation is not about banning screen time altogether (although this can be the case), it is knowing and comprehending when and how screen time is allowed to take time from of the everyday. Other activities are believed to be more important, such as physical outdoor play or doing chores, and these are firmly based in closeness to Britta. Her negotiation is based on these two forms of knowledge: that of the horizon, which is often opaque, and the close knowledge of her small life-world. She does not question the close knowledge. If she does at all, it is in relation to the recommendations she references. The "possibility of knowledge" is taken for granted (Husserl 1995), while reflexivity is needed to grasp this knowledge. As Luckmann (1970) notes, in the small life-worlds, you feel "at home," without "many uncertainties" (1970:590). The parents exemplify this by relying on a

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[72] Emphasis in original.

feeling to determine when their children's screen time becomes excessive, which they often describe as intuitive and conditional. The horizons, however, are steeped in uncertainty, while one notable quality of our immediate reality is that it is understandable to us (Luckmann 1970:590). Here, parenting itself could be considered a small life-world, which is based in Britta's intuition and a determined feeling of what is 'right', while the horizons remain opaque.

Temporal aspects are often present in the interviews when the parents are asked to reflect on opinions and recommendations around screen time. When asked what she thinks about these issues, Pernilla gives another example to show how intertwined screen time has become in her family's daily life:

> We don't focus too much on exact time or minutes, like one hour, two hours, or whatever; what we think about is variety. It shouldn't be a whole day of just video games and TV. But if we've been outside and done something, maybe he's been to gymnastics or we've been to the pool, then we use the screen to help him unwind, relax and rest. And then we stop the activity. So, we try to avoid this. (Pernilla, three children aged 4, 8 and 11)

Pernilla references how variation is, in fact, a practice; her approach to managing screen time is to offer alternatives, often physical activities. Screen time is a way to relax, to unwind. an interview with another set of parents, Frank, father of a six-year-old, notes that: "Screen time isn't as important during low-energy hours […] We've talked a lot about not watching screens early on Saturday mornings. That's prime time when you're well-rested." (Frank). Screen time is not allowed to be "prime time," as Frank explains it; it is just one activity among others, however, not prioritized. Screen time should be a way to wind down, not the center of activity. Limitation practices are at the heart of these discussions, which very much falls in line with official recommendations and public discourse. Screen time is not perceived as a central activity, or as what these parents believe to be a central activity; it is for winding down, used when energy is already low.[73]

Screen time is not to become a replacement for other activities that require time, especially physical activity. As Frank explains: "[W]hat I mean is that there's a

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[73] The children's perspective on what is considered prime time is of course crucial in understanding the actual interplay within the household, which makes, for example, Sandberg et al.'s (2024) research on young children and their parents vital.

difference between time and time." (Frank). Temporality is about the qualities and quantities of time; here the issue is what the parents perceive as quality time for their children (see Christensen 2002). Screen time is hardly ever considered quality time, as has been discussed throughout this dissertation.[74] Elsa discusses her opinions on the boundaries of daily life and screen time, noting:

> I talk quite a bit with my friend about this. […] She said, yeah, you have to think about what you'd do instead of the screen. If you watch, if you use the screen instead of spending time together or instead of having dinner together, then it's not okay. But if you use the screen so I can cook in peace and everyone's happy, and then we eat dinner together, then the screen is good. (Elsa, two children aged 3 months and 2 years)

The value of screen time is dependent on the contexts in which it is used. The parents note that screen time sometimes needs to be limited – that at certain times, the screen is "not ok" (while other times, it is). Elsa discusses screen time as secondary time; it is not allowed to be prime time. Screen time, according to her, is either secondary time or distraction time. It is also clear that this depends on what screen is being used, as not all screens are valued equally. Elsa and her partner Svante note that watching television together, specifically a program on farming and farm animals, could unite the family's screen use. Svante expresses that this could indeed be prime time – a cozy time for the family to talk, snuggle up and enjoy the program together. While their children are still very young, the parents feel that they could hopefully promote their children's interests in animals and nature.

While not all parents explicitly formulate where these ideas and ideals emanate from, they bear characteristics that are often easily recognizable because of their reproduction in the interviews. The key resides in actually understanding the parents' negotiations as mediatory mechanisms, where the interplay of ideals, norms and values between the horizons and the everyday experiences is central. The mediatory mechanisms provide a quality of the subjective experience, as they are based on deliberation and negotiation, featuring both internal and external ideals. Limitation is then both an ideal that can be 'seen' as a horizon in the life-

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[74] This is from the parents' perspectives; the children themselves could very well describe screen time as quality time (see Christensen 2002 for a discussion on this). This is, however, acknowledged by some of the parents in Chapter 4.

world, and a feature of everyday practices and negotiations. In regard to screen time, limitation relies on the schemes of interpretation that the parents draw on and as such can be seen as a defining aspect of screen time (in the many forms it has been discussed here). Limitation is, in this sense, a moral issue, not a 'natural' practice. This limitation extends to limiting the actual valuing of screen time – for example, only letting screen time constitute quantity, or secondary, time. Temporality is not linear or measurable in these notions of screen time; it is often wholly about quality, a subjective notion of temporality. Its contexts dictate how this time is experienced: as quality time or – less useful – quantity time (see Christensen 2002).

Gerd notes that regulation and limitation are not a goal in itself, as she explains: "Yeah, absolutely to always have a 'why'; otherwise, I don't believe in... I don't believe in, like, admonitions and bans if you don't understand why they're there, you know. Or regulations." (Gerd, two children aged 11 and 14). In Gerd's view, having an ideal that is based on limitation is not effective if there is not a reason for limitation. The horizons do not set rules or dictate the practices and values of everyday life; these are subjective experiences and, as such, negotiations and practices of meaning-making. Horizons are influential in establishing schemes of reference (see Schütz 1970). The difference is that schemes of reference are subjective, while the horizons are somewhat external cognitive constructions in individuals, which are more or less determined dimensions of the life-world. As a form of resistance to the horizons, Gerd continues to discuss creating a balance between being critical and seeing the positive aspects of screen time:

> You don't need to be oppositional to be critical, but maybe it's about balance, like, yeah, you can see that this [side of it] is very positive, but maybe we should be a bit more cautious with this [side of it] or question it a bit. (Gerd)

To Gerd, the solution is to talk with her children about screen time. This becomes her resistance to the perceived harmful features of the phenomenon. She discusses screen time as having two sides, and she feels they are seldom exclusive. Moreover, some parents relate screen time to other morally charged horizons of harm:

> Let's take another example: I used to smoke, but now I quit, for the last few months. But when I was smoking, I was doing something bad for my health, and I wouldn't want my children to do it. So maybe I know that looking at the screen all the time is not ok, but I do it anyway, but I don't want my children to do it.

Especially while they are growing up. It also has to do with their physique, their eating habits, they need to grow up healthy and there's this responsibility to care for their best interests. Maybe if there was someone watching over me, maybe that person would have said 'maybe you need to cut down on looking at the screen a little bit, buy books instead of reading them online or as pdfs or whatever.' (Max, two children aged 8 and 13)

Max illustrates this moral limitation as part of other horizons of harm and unwanted behavior. Historically, and within the contemporary context, these harms (such as smoking) can be understood as unquestioned – they are in a sense "objective" values within a cultural and historical context (Putnam 1990). There is a discrepancy between what Max himself sees as his own choice and the way this could reflect on his children. He notes that screen time colonizes the social, mental and physical world of his children, something he continues to express as a source of frustration. Max notes that this is usually a two-way situation, as limiting screen time was a source of frustration for both the parents and the children. His children, he says, often judge his own screen use, saying that's it is unfair that he gets to be on his phone. Max's reply is simply that he is an adult, so he is allowed to "to what he wants." Max describes a situation that he feels amounts to a scenario where no-one is really happy. He confesses that he still feels that screen time is part of a certain type of on-going "tension," which he often feels is part of his family's everyday life. The metaphor here is of a moral character, and Max's experience is based on the well-being of his family.

You never know how it will turn out: Imagining the future

The above section has discussed how ideals and values are articulated in the interviews, often understood as different forms of limitation. These range from broader societal problems to everyday life practices and issues, where the parents often reference the interplay between these different ideals as part of their screen time negotiations (such as the effects of technology, limitations of screen use, recommendations). While these negotiations can be characterized by clarity and opaqueness, they are mediated through an understanding of the context, and the horizons, in which they are situated. As stated above, one quality of the horizon is that it is not determined in the same way as experiences or phenomena that are in close proximity to individuals. Horizons are unclear, as they are often more or

less far from the immediate reality that individuals experience, as well as the knowledge upon which they rely. Horizons are not solely what has been discussed thus far as public discourses, imagined ideals and practices. Horizons are also the way in which the future is imagined, which many of the parents articulate in their interviews. After a lengthy discussion on screen time and its perceived issues, I asked Martin what he thought were the consequences of screen time in his children's lives:

> It might be that for children's future development, it's actually great if they play as many [digital] games as they want. Because that's how society will look in 20 years, and they'll find better jobs because they have a skill. No idea. There's also this inherent fear in most things you do. Because you don't know. (Martin, three children aged 4, 8 and 11)

Instead of answering the question directly, Martin describes the opposite situation – that frequent screen time may in fact be very beneficial for his children. Just before this, Martin and Pernilla discussed how the realities of everyday life are so different from family to family that it is impossible to talk about screen time as a universal phenomenon. They argue that recommendations, for example, may relieve stress from certain parents, while others may feel more stressed because of them. According to them, this comes down to parents' putting a lot of focus on their children's health. This illustrates how they perceive that institutions and public discourses put pressure on parents to act 'right' or 'good.' However, these seem two-fold: children's health is near unquestionable as an important aspect of parenting, while discourses around what is 'right' are based in contemporary cultural contexts (see Hays 1996; Dermott 2016). Furedi (2008) also notes this distinction, arguing that rather than preventing poor health among children, the unyielding focus on children's development creates insecurities and a lack of confidence in how to actually parent among parents. While Pernilla and Marting might not express a direct lack of confidence, they showcase the insecurities that emanate from managing and negotiating screen time.

Besides providing a clear example of how horizons bear characteristics of the unknown and opaque, Martin is referencing horizons of a future that is all but clear to him. This type of horizon differs from what has previously been discussed. This is not based on the perceived approaches to screen time in terms of recommendations or debates, but rather on imagination and dreams, in the sense

of imagining the future.[75] While the horizon is mostly imagined as a possible scenario, Martin notes that this is what makes this type of horizon unique – the degree to which it is indeterminable. Even though Martin's argument is largely based on a positive outlook, he still references the fear of the unknown, which he sees as "built-in" to this kind of imagination. The horizon is of unknown character, while the act of imagining it, according to Martin, is primarily characterized by a sense of fear.

Not knowing how the perceived effects of screen time will finally be resolved (if at all) is connected to this fear of the unknown. The opaque horizons alluded to here are still part of the parents' "scheme of reference" (Schütz 1970). Navigating everyday life with the horizons requires reflexivity and negotiations in the form of both values and action, while the outcome of changes – at least over the long-term – remains opaque. Development in terms of future scenarios is uncertain, and Martin notes that: "You have to be able to live with that uncertainty somehow" (Martin). While the characteristics of the horizons resemble those of imagination, they also include features that are seen as possible futures. These futures are also based on practices – discursive or enacted – as being able to envision a future in which action has an effect is paramount for action to have meaning (Taylor 2004). Uncertainty may be at the heart of Martin's statements. Nonetheless, the future he imagines is possible within the realm of meaning concerning screen time. Stefan puts it similarly when he describes this uncertainty in terms of the grey area of what the future might entail.

> So it's hard to see what it'll look like, you know. Maybe there will be forces that think this is terrible and start thinking about how to use social media in a more productive way. Where you participate differently, you know. Then suddenly, allowing more screen time might become more relevant. (Stefan, two children aged 6 months and 3 years)

Stefan feels that if things change on a more structural level, it would in turn effect everyday practices around screen time. He still sees future scenarios as anchored in his everyday life. He quickly notes that his discussion has to do with scenes and content which he feels provide more "quality" in terms of interaction. He notes that YouTube has helped him launch his professional career in sports as well.

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[75] This is not the same as what has been used to describe imaginaries.

YouTube is then deemed one of the screen uses that he feels might be beneficial in the future, while other content, such as social media, is less likely to be beneficial. His partner, Kristina, agrees, and hopes that the future will provide more "authentic" experiences when it comes to screens.

The scenarios are still imagined situations – they are horizons of uncertainty, albeit of different character. Discussing media use or screen time as equivalent to other provinces of meaning than that of the immediate life-world, which can be "the world of art, the world of dreams" (Schütz 1970:253), would quickly become problematic. The horizons that exist for these parents remain very similar in terms of their schemes of reference (while they may be articulated differently in the interviews). The imagined futures are still based on possible outcomes – a potential reality to which the parents draw attention – and the arguments are based in concrete experiences. Screen time should be used more "productively," Stefan argues, and provides an example of a reality where screens are used in meaningful ways. In this case, objects and practices – such as screens and screen time – are meaningful materials and practices, not just technological devices created through scientific advancements. As Martin, Stefan and Pernilla articulate this, screen time is generally viewed as problematic, but there is a possibility for (quite radical) change. These horizons are related to practices of limitation in their everyday life, as they proclaim that practices can also change in relation to larger societal changes. In their imagined futures, there is opposition towards the digital society (and internet specifically) as a harmful influence that colonizes social life (see Syvertsen 2020). The ideas of danger are still present, especially among parents who reflect on what they perceive as a more tangible and realistic future.

> Interviewer: I know it's hard in real life, but if you could imagine a little. What would you want to do instead of sitting down to use a screen?
>
> Frida: I'd wish that maybe I'd just read a book instead. If I just want to sit and relax instead of looking at things on my phone that just make you tired and dumb. […] [M]aybe the kids would be a little more creative. […] But with less screen time, or if society looked different, maybe they'd be a bit more creative and find it easier to come up with things to do. (Frida, three children aged 6, 9 and 11)

Creativity once again emerges in Frida's vision (as discussed in the above section) of a positive future where screen time could be used more productively. The boundaries around the different media show how she values reading as something

positive, which is in stark contrast to her view of using a screen device. Frida thus perceives screen time as a phenomenon that is "a mixture of presences and absences" (Sokolowski 2000:66). The boundaries of Frida's ideas create what is present and what is absent. Creativity, as Frida explains, is absent in her experience of screen time because the benefits of screen time are limited in this regard. What her statement also contains is the premise of "society being different." It is not only in the practice of minimizing screen time that the limitations and boundaries are present but also in the absence of a society that enables these changes. While horizons work as different backdrops, this does not mean they do not intertwine, relate to each other, or aggregate to create more complex meanings and experiences.

As horizons become complex and relate to a spectrum of different determined and undetermined phenomena in the parents' everyday lives, so does the nature of these horizons. Understanding screens and their related practices as meaningful, Doris shows how these objects and uses embody everyday futures, as well as how she, in experiencing them, questions and negotiates these futures.

> What's healthy in this? What's not healthy in this? What do I think again? What do I feel? And do I understand that everything coming at me in some way affects me? And how do I actually handle it? That's how it'll be. I think it'll just keep going. So I don't know if I have a particular vision, but if it continues and [the children] can handle it the way it seems they're handling it now, then that feels like a good vision for the future. […] So maybe my vision is to keep being able to manage new things that come our way, in this area as with everything else, in a healthy way. (Doris, two children aged 3 and 6)

In what can be seen as a very reasonable vision, Doris explains how a constant deliberation – an ongoing process of high reflexivity – is, to her, key to handling future screen time issues. It is evident that reflexivity is used as a mechanism to handle the "plurality of imagined worlds" (Appadurai 1996:5) that Doris faces in her everyday life. What is constant, according to Doris, is that change will keep happening. This change needs to be handled and routinized, as the end goal is to create a stable environment for her children. New things will keep coming and keep disrupting the consistency of previous solutions to domestic screen use. Doris' vision of an ideal scenario is being able to be reflexive enough to handle these new disruptions. Screen time, as a phenomenon in daily life, is just one of these disruptions. Parents in contemporary Western society "are expected to make

conscientious decisions about the uses of digital and mobile media as well as all other aspects of the child's life" (Chambers 2016:77). The features of contemporary everyday life are filled with responsibilities and ideals that parents are expected to adhere to. While transgressions and disruptions are part of everyday life and need to be handled, future scenarios can include the realization of such limiting practices, in time, becoming limited themselves.

> I guess they'll grow up with phones, the kids, and have them close because that's how people live. Now that they're pretty young, we can resist it. But it's not like we can keep them in some little reserve. They have friends and all. (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9)

Josefin expresses how there are limits to her practices around screen time. Her situation will eventually and undoubtedly change, and while she still feels she can limit her children's screen time, change is inevitable. Her line of thinking around the limits to her resistance is grounded in the notion that screen time should be limited, even as her children grow older. Josefin continues to state that her children will "probably become like everyone else," which to her means having a lot of screen time. What Hays (1996) describes as "the wall between home and world" (1996:3), will become increasingly brittle as her children grow older, which becomes a source of insecurity for Josefin. This, she tells me, comes down to their increased future independence. She further qualifies this argument with another potential scenario – that research may actually show that screen time can be tied to mental health. This, she says, may change the way we imagine screen time – if hard evidence becomes available. While this would provide "a different climate around it [the screen time debate]," Josefin is quick to note that parents today, in her experience, often turn to and actually need screens in child-rearing. The ambivalences Josefin feels around the "home and world" comes down to rationality and scientific clarifications around screen time, but also a sense of everyday necessity.

If anything does carry over to the future it will be the ideas, ideals and norms about limiting screen time. Being able to practice this kind of perceived 'good' parenting is often seen "as a necessity yet achieving it is elusive" (Dermott 2016:137). The elusiveness of 'good' contemporary parenting practices is always present in the parents' comments about screen time. Limiting means taming this elusiveness, which is dependent on many horizons, not just those of the future.

Josefin cites her children's social life and friends as such a horizon (as something she 'sees' in the life-world, but does not wholly experience) in which they inevitably, according to her, will have an influence on screen time in the future. Horizons can be described as having "implicated meaning" (Woodruff Smith 2023:64), which means that as Josefin articulates her ideas within a certain context, it attains a specific meaning. The horizons around screen time are dense with implicated meaning, such as harm, which is a feature of all the different types of horizons presented here. This is a scheme of reference that itself is partly a set of implicated meanings, which are not always actively and constantly reflected upon (if not asked to do so).

The horizons appear and are often experienced as close to the parents, which many of them have expressed throughout this chapter. They have shown how horizons contain more of less clear values around the phenomenon, and that these values 'feel' close to the parents' everyday experiences. For instance, all of the parents state that they have given considerable consideration to screen time; they can 'see' the horizons of the phenomenon from a variety of different vantage points. Screen time may not significantly harm children, but its implicated meaning is that this is a definite possibility. Idun states that in an unknown future, a high level of reflexivity is cited as the primary navigational tool. In her words:

> But at some point, you start to let go of it. […] [I]n the future, I think [my partner] and I will have more to discuss on this. Because he's much more... he's much more about forbidding it entirely, and I'm more like, 'you just have to find a way to do it in a good way instead.' Or a positive way, or discuss it so that there are multiple dimensions to it in that case. (Idun, two children aged 6 months and 4 years)

In a family or a relationship of caretakers (however this situation might look), mediatory processes never exist in a vacuum. Idun explains how she and her partner do not necessarily share the same ideas about how to best approach screen time in the future. Idun asserts that there is never anything that is simply "black or white." She feels there are many more dimensions to the discussion, and it involves a back and forth with her child, which she describes as "testing limits." Idun feels her child often tests the limits, and it is in her limitation practices that they form new, functioning practices. Her child, therefore, has an impact on how these limits are established, again illustrating Idun and her son's joint agency. This is also how she imagines the future. However, she sees this as becoming harder and harder, as she experiences her child as an early developer. Idun tells me that

other people often think her son is older, noting that this is sometimes a bit of a "mindfuck."

As an attempt to transcend, or broaden, the limits of the phenomena of screen time, Idun argues that limiting practices (forbidding) may not be the best way forward. Instead, she believes in making screen time activities associated with something positive. According to contemporary, predominantly Western ideals, "parenthood is a serious undertaking that requires careful consideration" (Dermott 2016:142), which is articulated in Idun's statement. To Idun, the future means moving the boundaries of practices that remain unclear. The horizon is, as such, unknown, undeterminable, while the reflexivity Idun presents is central to ensuring a positive future. She demonstrates that there are multiple dimensions to her children's screen time and screen use by broadening the scope of ideas around screen time. Idun still operates within the boundaries of limitation, as her experiences can be understood as "'predilineat[ing]' a horizon of further motivated possibilities left open by the content" (Woodruff Smith 2023:69). Simply put, she still feels screen time is problematic and negotiates the alternatives within this horizon.

The parents describe possible future scenarios, and while they are all based on what they perceive as 'reality,' the negotiations around screen time play a large part in this reality. Looking to the future, the parents reference and relate to horizons of the unknown, both in terms of what is to come and what their present ideas and practices may entail in the future (as in what effects they may have). Reflexivity often becomes the driving factor in imagining this future as a "serious consideration of the impact of [the parents'] actions" (Dermott 2016:141). Reflexivity is, however, not always enough to adapt and handle the future. Societal change is also raised as an imagined dimension of the future. While most parents here view this as an "ideal scenario," they remain within the lines of thinking that they themselves are responsible for what outcomes the future might bring.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the parents have shown how the horizons are, more often than not, opaque and unknown. The parents negotiate these unknown and opaque horizons to make sense of screen time in their daily lives. The parents presented in this dissertation are based in Sweden, meaning that they live and spend most

of their time in the country. This means they encounter ideals and ideas that are specific to a Swedish context, while others are more general and trans-national in character. As Taylor (2004) notes, "[i]deas always come in history wrapped up in certain practices, even if these are only discursive practices" (2004:33). This becomes apparent in what Dermott (2016) describes as the ideals of how parents do 'good' parenthood. Public discourses, recommendations, other parents' opinions, the future (and so on) are all conceptualizations that constitute different horizons. Moving through the life-world makes these horizons visible, as the parent have described. However, all horizons are not seen at the same time, and they have different levels of clarity.

How screen time is experienced by the parents is based in contexts that are mediated through their statements. In these statements, they formulate their experiences, but in practice, the over-arching cultural narrative is unquestionably subjective in character (as well as in the analysis of it). The parents discuss their subjective visions, hopes, issues, fears, solutions and resistance in reflecting on screen time. What this chapter has shown is how these different positions, ideals and practices are reliant on certain horizons, such as the problems caused by excessive screen time. At times, the parents view similar horizons, however, it is always from their own vantage point – their subjective life-world. The reference points, while often very similar, become the basis for the parents' mediatory mechanisms, where limitation, balance, uncertainty and adaptability are the terms under which these issues are mediated. By understanding everyday screen time negotiations as central to this mediation, the subversions and deliberations of the parents in this study are constitutive of the screen time imaginaries, not only in responding to them but also in resisting them.

The parents in this study are dealing with horizons of the unknown and unexpected, while at the same time having a more or less clear image of what screen time and its consequences mean for their children. This thus concerns practices of parenting as much as practices that relate to screen time and screen time practices. As Morgan (2011) argues, family is something that is continuously done in practice; the concept does not simply exist as an essentialist category – something that just is because of any perceived inherent properties. The same is true for contemporary parenting; it is constituted by practices in daily life. While screen time remains the focal point, this is intimately related to how these parents do parenthood – how they parent. In the case of screen time, this parenting is

based on limitation: ideas and practices of limitation that shape everyday life and create boundaries of values and action between the different movements through the day-to-day. Introducing screen time, for example, brings with it the ideals, norms and possible practices available associated with this specific phenomenon for the parents. The negotiations that follow are themselves limitations, as the parents limit and create boundaries for how they understand the horizons. Some parents, as has been discussed, do not think screen time is harmful to their children, but still have a sense of shame when they do not actively limit screen time. Their negotiations reveal the "troubles" (Mills 1970) they face in daily life and how their experiences of these troubles are mediated as "issues." As has been discussed above, these troubles are in no way an independent and separate part of the parents' everyday; they exist within the total experience in the parents' life-world.

The parents often describe screen time as a colonizer of other types of activities that demand certain amounts of time, such as physical activity or creative undertakings. Limitation is as much about freeing up time as it is about categorizing and valuing time. The values and activities the parents discuss – from creativity as an everyday ideal to sledding as an activity not to be colonized by screen time – are relegated to specific valued "spaces" in their everyday life. In this, limitation (as both negotiations and practices) serves to create boundaries between ideals, and issues arise when these boundaries are transgressed. For the parents, these boundaries and transgressions rely on negotiations, where the horizons they experience as relevant to their everyday life play a large part. Horizons are thus part of limiting how screen time can be negotiated in everyday life, and while it can be resisted and contested, it is difficult for the parents to truly transgress the boundaries these horizons create. Horizons are limitations of reference, in that the parents are forced to think within certain spheres of ideas. "[S]pecific practices that are culturally and socially accepted as good" (Dermott 2016:139) are what the parents rely on, even if these ideals and practices are ambivalent, contradictory or paradoxical at times.

8. Conclusion and contribution

The following chapter is dedicated to a presentation and discussion of the empirical conclusions and theoretical constitutions, as well as a closing discussion that situates this dissertation in a larger context. The initial section should be read as a brief summary, presenting how the themes within the dissertation were ultimately understood. Following this section, there is a more in-depth discussion on the analytical conclusions and key findings. This includes discussions around the more overarching findings that can be drawn from the analytical work done within this dissertation. This section largely focuses on parenting ideals and practices, while a following section is devoted to a more specific discussion of screen time as a phenomenon. This argues that screen time is a liminal phenomenon, a feature of daily life in seemingly constant negotiation. The dissertation concludes with a more general discussion in a section devoted to further research and potential implications of the study.

Brief concluding summary

The content of this dissertation is built on dialogues with 36 parents. While these parents expressed a broad range of opinions and ideas, many of the negotiations in their statements referenced very similar ideals and norms. The participants stated that screen time, as a phenomenon related to their children's media use, was often a source of anxiety, conflict and stress in daily life. However, the parents also expressed that screen time and screen use were a continuous feature of everyday life, with some parents even alluding to it as a 'natural' part of modern life. This can be understood as an attempt to routinize screen time. At the same time, screen time constitutes something contradictory and paradoxical to the parents, as the phenomenon is mundane and extraordinary at the same time. This duality is based on, on the one hand, screen time as a routinized part of daily life. On the other hand, the phenomenon invokes values, ideals and norms that signal perceived harm, resulting in parental management and restriction. The parents'

experiences are largely based on this duality, exhibiting how complex and paradoxical the negotiations, and subsequent practices, can become.

In investigating screen time and parenthood, contemporary parenting ideals and norms were made explicit. These included the ways in which parents depicted the 'right' and 'good' way to parent in terms of screen time. Good parenthood and good parenting practices (see Sparrman et al. 2016) were discernible aspects of the parents' negotiations and statements around screen time. These ideas and norms were often based on what are believed to be largely unattainable ideals. Furthermore, these are not universal norms that exist without context; they are wholly contemporary and largely tied to social class. While not all parents presented here are, or consider themselves to be, middle-class, these values are often theorized to be related to the ideals of groups that hold certain knowledge and resources. This means that even though the parents may not associate themselves with the specific social class, they consistently negotiate these values in their experiences with screen time. These ideals are embodied in specific promoting practices (Lareau 2011), such as children's development of creativity and the parental pressures of intensive parenting (Hays 1996). These ideals can further be linked to notions of cultural taste, where certain content is deemed more 'ok' by the parents based on, for example, 'good' music or strong educational elements.

The above perspectives become paramount in understanding how the parents' ideas (as negotiations) and practices (as competencies or doing and displaying parenthood) are moral in character. They rely on motives of duty (Putnam 1990) to negotiate their children's screen use and screen time. This is based on a certain understanding of screen time as something objectively valued in the digital age, which can be seen in the parents' statements. External factors, or horizons (Schütz 1970; Husserl 1995), such as public discourses or the opinions of other individuals, are perceived as seemingly objective values (around the 'harmful media'). These dimensions are mediated in the parents' daily lives, at times almost internalized. The values become part of parental displays (Finch 2007), constituting what the parents perceive as displaying 'good' parenthood. However, some of the parents evaluate themselves as too "wholesome" or "goody two-shoes," inadequate or overly reflexive, going "against the stream," resisting unrealistic parenting norms or being restrictive for the child's own good. All these positions place the parents' deliberations within the realm of moral negotiations,

of what is actually perceived as the 'right' or 'wrong' way to parent. Understanding these connections provides insight into parenting practices in modern Swedish society, which is a society imbued by screens and screen practices in every aspect of everyday life.

Discussions on key findings

The aims of this dissertation were to highlight the parents' subjective experiences as they negotiate the values of screen time in contemporary Swedish society, as well as the practices related to the phenomenon in their everyday life. As part of the methodology, the study explored the parents' life-worlds with as few preconceived notions as possible. Investigating the parents' narratives, negotiations and social contexts in relation to screen time provided empirical material that encompassed many contexts and meaning-making processes in which the parents found themselves. The four empirical chapters have been dedicated to the most prevalent of these themes: screen time as part of everyday life, parental practices and screen time, screen time and good parenthood, and parenting and screen time horizons. In these chapters, significant attention has been given to answering the first research question: *How do the parents experience and negotiate the screen time phenomenon in their everyday lives?* The presentation has been both descriptive (in presenting the participants' own voices) and interpretive, which, as a broad analytical framework, understands all these negotiations and practices as experiences around, and of, screen time. The parents' experiences of screen time are very much part of the mundane contexts of daily life. Nonetheless, screen time ties into notions of proper media use and technology, moral questions of good parenthood and parenting, contemporary parenting ideals and norms, and negotiations around the recommendations and public discourses in meaning-making processes in the parents' everyday lives.

This dissertation has been thematically divided into two broader analytical discussions: one pertaining to the subjective experience of parenting and screen time, and the other on the moral life-world of the parents. Both of these discussions also pertain to the shared, intersubjective aspects of the life-world. This is where the importance of children's agency, other parents' and extended family's opinions, as well as the public discourses encountered through, for example, the childcare center or parenting groups, becomes visible. While this thematic division remains one line of reasoning from an analytical standpoint, the

way in which the parents express their experiences is not as easily demarcated. This partly comes down to working with rich source material, which poses several challenges. As discussed, the demarcation of what the parents are referencing or discussing is often not clear cut. This means that certain aspects of specific statements could potentially be placed elsewhere in the dissertation. This is certainly true when the parents are discussing the moral aspects of screen time. Although morality has not been explicitly treated in all empirical chapters of the dissertation, the theme constitutes a central aspect of the parents' statements.

This becomes evident in many of the parents' attempts to make screen time a 'naturalized' or routinized activity in their everyday life. While these processes, on the surface, are about routinizing media and its related uses as part of domestic family life (as argued by Sandberg et al. 2021), making something neutral also means attempting to de-value the phenomenon. Screen time encompasses these values as part of the contexts in which it exists, and the parents relate to these intersubjective contexts continuously (this is either implicit or explicit). In attempting to make screen time a routine part of everyday life, negotiations around how to value the phenomenon become part of their experiences. This is where the ideals and norms around both screen time and contemporary parenthood are discussed and reflected upon. The parents discuss screen time as sometimes equivalent to other mundane activities such as eating or playing, but at the same time, the phenomenon encompasses specific ideals when compared to these other activities.

Screen time is then not extraordinary to most of the participants; the phenomenon is largely seen as a mundane activity, albeit sometimes problematic. Several of the parents note that they do not actively attempt to limit or restrict screen time, instead practicing and negotiating other strategies related to the phenomenon. These strategies include promoting activities that are 'just as fun' as what happens on screens, actively moving away from discourses around harm and fear. These activities instead embody an imagined environment of openness and awareness for the parents' children, as well as questioning and resisting the image of the perfect parent who constantly is expected to do the 'right' thing. As Olof notes in relation to restrictions and the impossible work of constantly surveilling his children's screen time, these are strategies to reduce anxiety in their everyday life: "There is a better atmosphere in the home if the parents are free from anxiety" (Olof, one child aged 3). This does however not mean that the ideals around

parenthood are not part of the negotiations. The pressures around being a good parent, putting your children first, adhering to experts and recommendations, displaying (Finch 2007) your good parenthood – are all aspects that relate to the norms of contemporary, Western parenting cultures (see Hays 1996; Furedi 2008; Lareau 2011).

The way in which some parents discuss these ideals can be understood as a kind of resistance to the ideology of, for example, intensive parenting. Instead of exhibiting and expressing a life-world that is intensively time consuming and wholly child-centered, many of the parents argue for a more open approach to screen time in the domestic space. As Lehto (2019) argues in a Finnish study of blogs focusing on "bad" motherhood,[76] this could be understood as countering the "exhausting nature of intensive, anxious, and risk-averse contemporary parenting culture" (Lehto 2020:657). This is, of course, not problem-free, as many of the participants feel this approach is associated with laziness or other conceptions of uninvolved parenting, signaling negative parenting discourses. This means that ideals and norms around parenting in the digital age, – often experienced as exhausting pressures from many sources (not least internal) – make up substantial parts of the parents' negotiations.

The parenting ideals also play an important part in experiences of the phenomenon in terms of consistency and coherence, making screen time practices align with broader parenting strategies and practices in the domestic space. It is still important to note that while essentially all parents express the above ideas, they are not always negotiated similarly. Some of the parents believe in stricter regulations and put very specific limits on their children's screen time. Still, these parents acknowledge that screen time cannot be put under total control. As Josefin states: "It's not like we can keep them [the children] in some kind of reservation" (Josefin, two children aged 5 and 9). Frida explains that screen time is also "a way to socialize, that's why you can't limit it altogether" (Frida, three children aged 6, 9 and 11). In understanding screen time – and more broadly media use – as features of contemporary society, the phenomenon calls for both attention and inattention. Surveilling, monitoring and regulating screen time is part of the mundane everyday life of the parents. However, so is the realization that screen

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[76] Through framing the bad mothering narrative as resistance to over-bearing parenting ideals, these blogs often showcase the self-deprecating and frustrating aspects of parenting and, as such, also serve as a place for both the writer and reader/commenter to vent.

time is an ordinary thing – it is part of the coherent and unquestionable life-world. This often calls for a form of inattention, where screen time is a continuous part of social life, often a substantial part. These two reference points – attention and inattention – form the framework in which the parents negotiate the values of the phenomenon and embody the subsequent practices. Managment often becomes a question of intuition to the parents, when screen time simply *feels* 'right' or 'wrong.' The small life-world could in this sense be considered the context of parenting and parenthood itself, encompassing many everyday situations. Parenting is a special realm of meaning and experience, relying on specific sets of knowledge and having its own boundaries.

Good parenthood regarding screen time is certainly part of more complicated discourses than what, at least to any significant extent, has been discussed in this dissertation. This becomes apparent in the finding that notions of good and bad parenting are negotiated in ambivalent ways, where the child's media practices are perceived as good or bad depending on both context and practice (e.g., in terms of creativity). As Silje expresses it: "[The child] gets so much joy from it [the screen], he should also be allowed to take part in that side of life" (Silje, one child aged 3). While this democratic family view (Livingstone & Blum-Ross 2020; see also Giddens 1998) is visible in the material, it is rather to be understood as joint agency (see Moran 2024). Practices perceived as shameful or anxiety inducing, such as using the screen as a babysitter or distraction, are juxtaposed with the child's own enjoyment and perceived agency. Temporal aspects then become moral ones – the object is tethered to the practice and how it is valued. The parents often compare these practices to those of other parents, effectively displaying their own parenthood, or being displayed to. This is, in itself, a valuing practice, as the parents see themselves as "not as bad as" or other parents. They also perceive that other parents as displaying false images of their true parenting practices, instead focusing on status, social class and fake authenticity. The display related to screen time is based on responsibility for children's well-being (see Hays 1996; Furedi 2008), which can be attributed to both the subjective and intersubjective contexts in which the parents live their lives. Responsibility, then, becomes a dualism, where the moral displays (explored in Chapter 6) and the way the parents experience the horizons of screen time (explored in Chapter 7) constitute two important dimensions of the moral discussion.

This does not mean that the parents take the recommendations, opinions and discourses at face value. The negotiations that the parents exhibit in the interviews remain vibrant examples of how all experiences around screen time and screen use are drawn on to formulate the ideals the parents express. These negotiations are often ambivalent, contradictory and at times paradoxical. In some ways, this seems to come down to an attempt to resist persistent public discourses around media use as harmful. The harm and danger of screen time becomes diluted in many of the parents' negotiations, especially when discussed as just one activity among many others. Many parents, for example, state that they do not think screens are that dangerous or harmful; still, they express worry and relate to the ideas of these harms when they articulate their negotiations. When negotiations arise around the positive or optimistic (as in future scenarios) aspects of screen time, the parents still relate to the norms of their children's media use as harmful. These discourses are indeed very persistent, and Anna notes how they permeate daily life as "screens are part of [the child's] everyday life" (Anna, one child aged 6). Screen time is inevitable to the parents, and with the phenomenon comes a spectrum of norms and ideals.

In exploring the parents' life-world, the negotiations that turn screen time work into a coherent everyday activity are crucial in understanding their experiences of the phenomenon. The everyday is a site of negotiations – of mundane practices and parenting ideals – that shows how the parents are still highly reflexive around screen time as a phenomenon. Not only does this point to the importance of investigating parenthood as being done (see Morgan 2011; Sparrman et al. 2016) in these negotiations and practices, it also situates the everyday as a crucial context for studying how we live with media in contemporary, highly mediated societies (e.g., Sweden). Everyday life remains an important context in which screen time and media use are constituted, contested and negotiated. These dimensions are in many ways also moral in character, as these negotiations, perceived ideals and practices are often based on moral deliberation and reflection. This points to a sense of morality that is based on the reflexivity of the parents, which becomes visible in the mediatory processes of recommendations, public discourses and other screen time horizons, as well as more subjective experiences in their daily lives. This is especially clear when some of the parents relate screen time discourses to unattainable ideals and standards. As Svante notes: "It feels like there's this vague portrayal of the family as idyllic [in how to handle screen time]" (Svante, two children aged 3 months and 2 years). Svante's statement signals an

understanding of certain parenting ideals and norms as unattainable in the messy, complex and often contradictory everyday life.

The parents' perspectives then add an important component to understanding screen time in a broader context, where the phenomenon is constantly valued (e.g., in discourses around "excessive" screen time). Parents are still not very visible in public discourse and certainly not in expert roles regarding screen time. However, parents are a vital source of knowledge and understanding, as they live with the issues of screen time every single day. What the parents have expressed in this dissertation highlights the importance of a specific kind of knowledge, one that includes the complexities of screen time in the parents' lived experiences. Together with other experts (e.g., in health care or psychology), a more holistic view of screen time can be created with a greater focus on scientific evidence and the dualistic nature of the phenomenon. These are not dichotomies, even though they are often positioned as such. These perspectives are complimentary and help create a more comprehensive understanding of a undoubtfully significant issue in the digital age.

Screen time: A structuration of everyday life

In this dissertation, I have dedicated significant space to discussing what I have called parental negotiations. In investigating this seemingly simple concept, the parents' meaning-making processes become visible and can be connected to their screen time practices as they describe them. Negotiations, as used here, refer to the expression and process of valuing, deliberating and ultimately (at least in part) coming to some sort of conclusion. While the conclusions are relevant, it is often in the way that the negotiation is expressed as a process based on experience that values are revealed. The parents' statements about screen time, as has been shown in the analysis, consist of complex, often inter-linked, meanings and values. The negotiations reproduce certain values, ideals and norms, such as discourses that view screen time as harmful. Several of these reproductions take place in the negotiations, at times even simultaneously. The parents, as agents, internalize, negotiate and mediate these values as part of an overarching system of meanings (see Giddens 1991).

The parents' everyday life becomes a site of reproduction of these systems of meaning. Screen time, as mediated by the parents, involves complex relationships

between parenthood ideals, public discourses around media, children and harm, moral deliberations around appropriate media use and middle-class norms on 'proper' screen practices. Giddens (1991) argues that there is a dynamic relationship between agent and structure, which is apparent in the parents' negotiations around the meaning and values of screen time. The parents are not simply subject to oppressive influences of institutional and discursive meaning structures, they negotiate these in relation to their own subjective experiences. However, many of the parents, depending on the issue, state that they generally believe that screen time is harmful (on some level). Other times, the reproduction of ideas and norms is expressed as resistance to certain ideals or contradictory statements. This resistance is still based on the persistent values that embody screen time. The phenomenon, then, becomes notable in that it can be understood as relating to all these norms, while being situated in the context of the digital age.

What are understood as contemporary middle-class norms around parenting – as intensive, highly emotional, time-consuming, fearful and insecure forms of parenthood (Hays 1996; Furedi 2008; Lareau 2011) – are highly present in this reproduction of social values. Screen time is a phenomenon based on ideas of 'appropriate' usage, with perceived 'proper' practices that should be followed. The parents' statements reveal these middle-class values (even though not all parents can be described as middle-class). Hesitance and resistance towards screen use, for example, is often seen as an 'appropriate' stance by the parents. Contradictory and paradoxical dimensions emerging around screen time – for example, digital detox and disconnection (Syvertsen 2020; Albris et al. 2024) – are not only tied to the phenomenon, they are also incorporated into how the values are reproduced by the parents. This becomes characteristic of the phenomenon and how it is expressed by the parents. It is a complex tapestry of meanings, which also include the ways in which other individual's opinions and experiences are negotiated. This includes the parents' own children, other parents and extended family. These intersubjective features of everyday life are also mediated through the social reproduction the parents engage in.

Furthermore, institutional recommendations, psychological research and medical research make claims about appropriate or excessive screen use based on findings within these fields. The aim of this dissertation is not to discount this research. However, these recommendations and findings present 'objective,' non-

contextual ideals – often very general ones. In the parents' reproduction of these ideals, they assign other values to the ideals and norms that are more closely related to those of agents, not systems of meaning. Emotions, for example, come into play in the form of genuine distress over a child's health, creativity and future development. In reproducing the perceived "truths" around screen time, norms and values based on the parents' own experiences manifest and are expressed. The practical application of these motives of duty (Putnam 1990) is based on insecurities about the actual effects or impact of screen time on children. In the end, screen time, as a daily and constantly experienced phenomenon, becomes indicative of parenting in the digital age.

The constant negotiations of screen time

While these values are reproduced through the phenomenon, negotiations are often an on-going process. The life-world, in which the parents' negotiations and experiences are based is a context and a subjective vantage point for the individual. To the individual (the parent), the life-world is complete in this sense. Screen time, in the deliberations that occur within the life-world, often seems to exist in a more or less constant liminal state; it is procedurally negotiated – at times agreed upon, at times contested – and remains a consistent part of the parents' movements through everyday life. Liminality refers to the 'limbo' of specific transitions, existing between a pre- and a post stage of, for example, transitional rituals. Liminality is the state during that transition (e.g., in the case of rituals) where the transition symbolizes change (e.g., from boy to man).[77] Screen time does not only refer to technological 'domestication' but to incorporating and routinizing the values of the phenomenon in everyday life. Screen time, as the parents state, is in many ways an everyday ritual, and as such also has immaterial qualities that are not always easily defined. Screen time moves between different states with different levels of clarity and opaqueness, distinguishable through the participants' statements. These seem based in how screen time is embodied by the ideals of 'good' modern-day parenthood, internalized morality and horizons in the form of public opinions and institutional recommendations. The liminal is based in the often-difficult process of navigating through these norms in the life-

[77] Liminal here is used in a more everyday use of the word. For more theoretical developments, see, e.g., Geertz (1973).

world, in which the saturation of ideals, ambivalences and contradictions produces insecurity among the parents (see Furedi 2008).

When the parents note, for instance, that they are uncertain of the effects of screen time on their children or express their negotiations of value around screen time and other activities, this is bound to have impact on their everyday practices. Screen time becomes the liminal space in which these negotiations take place, which almost always has unknown consequences. While some parents in this study have somewhat stable routines and established rituals around screen time, they are aware that changes are inevitable. This means that the phenomenon is often in flux, experienced as being able to revert to a liminal state even if the family's present daily rituals "work." This can potentially happen when their children grow older and their needs and social habits change, or when family constellations are transformed (e.g., after divorce). Changes, such as moving homes, entail negotiations around screen time and related everyday practices (such as how the television affects the home). Chambers (2016) discusses this liminality as collective negotiations around the potential benefits and disadvantages of media, where the domestic space is an important arena for these debates. Further, this is also where consensus around the media practices is established. While the parents have their own "scheme of reference" (see Schütz 1970), it is based on the intersubjective interactions within the life-world. These intersubjective interactions are part and parcel of how collective "cognitive schemas" (Chambers 2016) are formed and ultimately articulated (e.g., through interviews). The parents' approach to managing screen time moves between these positions, ultimately forming their perceived ideals around the phenomenon.

The deliberations around screen time are deeply entrenched in the relationship the parents have with their children, affecting how the parents value and manage screen time in their everyday life. The parents and the children can often be understood as having joint agency (Moran 2024) around screen time, meaning the parents' practices and negotiations are dependent on the children's own actions and opinions. This is especially noticeable in how parents with children of different ages discuss screen time. One transition concern how children's aging affects the way screen time is negotiated. This is even more evident among parents of young children. Here, the opaqueness of the future consequences of screen time are constantly prevalent. Parents of younger children are more focused on the physical, mental and social development, and vulnerability of their children (see

Lafton et al. 2023), which is clear from the interviews in this study. Children play an inherently central role in the liminality of screen time, even when they become teenagers. The negotiations parents of teenagers engage in revolve around the social aspects of screen time, often expressed as a balancing act between certain levels of control and children's need for independence. While these parents still generally discuss these negotiations in terms of screen time, the strict restrictions the phenomenon denote assume a different character.

Screen time can thus be understood in terms of the objects and content (the materiality of the screens), temporal dimensions, imagined practices (see Morgan 2011; Chambers 2016) and values and norms that surround these objects and practices. The technology and practices are not separable when discussing screen time; however, public discourses refer to and adapt the question. The conclusion in this study provides both an epistemological and ontological contribution to this body of knowledge, conceiving of screen time as a liminal phenomenon and understanding everyday experience as a site of incessant transitions. Even though these transitional elements could potentially be visible in public discourses around screen time, an exploration of the actual life-world of parents puts these dimensions into focus. Taken together, further focus is put on the actual negotiations that take place in the parents' everyday lives. Negotiations are, in themselves, largely liminal and transitional, as they function as processes of understanding and mundane explorations of the uncertainties around screen time. The parents are often uncertain how screen time affects their children, and when they are, further management practices are put into place. The notions of trying something out and seeing what happens, or of attempting to introduce fluidity and adaptation in screen time regulation and management practices, are ideas and ideals that relate to these negotiations. These are navigations through the liminal phenomenon that seldom have tangible end results for the parents other than an inherent desire to ensure their children's well-being, development and socialization processes.

In closing: Parenting ideals and media as practice

The ways in which the life-world has been described by the parents in this dissertation testifies to a world where media use and media technologies are deeply integrated in everyday life. These phenomena are often seen as in need of some kind of management. As a result, experiences around screen time are a central dimension to understanding parents and parenthood in a time and space saturated

by media. As it is a phenomenon related to the practices and ideals of media use and technology, understanding screen time in the way which it is discussed in this dissertation reveals something important about contemporary Western societies (specifically in Sweden). The empirical material signals that we live in a world where mediation and digital technologies are integrated as the perceived coherent life-world, regardless of whether this is resisted, agreed upon or negotiated in various ways. One key finding is that many of the parents' negotiations are around opaque and unknown outcomes and horizons. This often leads to negotiations that are ambivalent and contradictory. This is visible in how the parents present and reproduce ideals that are seemingly impossible to achieve, while still expressing the desire to achieve goals such as zero screen time for their children. While the parents know that this is a near impossible feat, the norms surrounding these expressions are paramount for understanding parenting and screen time in the digital age.

Certainly, a great deal of interview- and observation-based research has already been done concerning parents and their children's screen use and screen time (see Schofield Clark 2013; Livingstone & Blum-Ross 2020; Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2018; Jeffrey 2021a; Willet 2023; Sandberg et al. 2024a; 2024b). In the 2020s, screen time has also become a phenomenon that appears in many of these studies. However, what is sometimes lost in the study of media use and parenting are the broader narratives provided by sociology. These perspectives include the ideology of intensive parenting (Hays 1996), or paranoid parenting (Furedi 2008). While these perspectives have dominated sociological theories of parenting norms and ideals for the last few decades, the present study shows that they are still relevant in understanding contemporary parenthood and parenting. As screen time remains an increasingly prevalent and intensely debated topic, so do the viewpoints and pressures that are imposed on parents in the digital age. Screen time is a contemporary cultural phenomenon, and as it is named and discursively constructed (across numerous contexts), it holds norms and ideals that are deeply interwoven with how we live our lives.

As Couldry (2004) argues, media should be seen as a set of practices, which is also a way of narrowing potential gaps between media and communication studies and sociology. This requires a broadening of media use towards "media-oriented practice, in all its looseness and openness" (Couldry 2004:119). This opens for deeper dialogues on the importance of multi-disciplinary research. This should

not be mistaken as a limitation of these disciplines; in fact, ethnographers and social workers can contribute even more valuable insights that would broaden our understanding of parenting and screen time. In certain ways, digital sociology (see Orton-Johnson & Prior 2013) could be considered a great starting point to build a bridge between media and communication studies and sociology. However, media and communication studies have a rich heritage of sociologically based perspectives, sometimes referred to as media sociology. Basing exploratory approaches to media use on practices acknowledges both the strengths of sociology and media and communication studies. The key lies in understanding certain approaches to media and communication studies as what people do in relation to media, not only how they interpret texts (Couldry 2004). Screen time constitutes a substantial part of parents' everyday lives and will certainty continue to do so for many years to come. Culturally, the phenomenon needs to be considered when understanding how families live their lives in the digital age, whether it is in the form of parents' or children's experiences or in a discursively investigation.

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Appendix

Interview guide (translated)

Researcher: Magnus Johansson, Lund University (MKV phD project)

Theme 1: Everyday life and media

Can you describe a normal Wednesday in your family; what did this past one look like?

How would you describe your everyday?

What's important in your family/everyday

Describing the family

How do media use and screens factor into your everyday?

- Walk around the home
- How many screens/technologies are there
- How/when are they used
- What are the primary screens
- Who uses them – Individual/collective use

Theme 2: Screen time and everyday practices

How would you describe media use in your family?

- How do you use media; how do your children use media (differences)?
- What rules are there, if any?
- What influences these rules/views (context)?

Is your experience of media use different to other members in the family, how?

What are your general feelings on screens and screen time?

- Negative/positive (look at how this is balanced)
- Cyber bullying, gaming, safety online etc.
- How do you handle these?

- Do you seek information outside of the family for advice, and in that case, where?

Where do your views on (appropriate) media use come from?

- Investigate institutions (schools, health care, etc.) and public discourse
- What does that do to your view on media use and screens

Theme 3: Screen time and morality

How do you feel media use and screens affect your family's everyday life?

- Image of the family
- Is there an effort to create something else (status quo/ideal)?
- How do you view future situations in the family around screen time?

Do you speak with other families about your media use?

- How do they view it?
- How are their views different/similar from yours?
- Do you adapt your views in relation to other families (discourses)?
- Is anyone a heavy user; how does that differ from other use?
- Do you feel other families are striving towards something?

Are there any institutions you come across that discuss media use and screen time; in what way?

- Meetings, parent meetings, other institutions/recommendations
- How do you feel they view screen time?
- How do you feel these views resonate with your family's media use?
- Are there conflicts (school/parent - institution/own values)?

Do your views differ from these services, how?

- How do your encounters with these views look?

Closer: Reminders

Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation?

Can I contact you for follow-up interviews in the future?

Participant information (in Swedish)

Forskningsprojekt: *Skärmtid, föräldraskap och moral* - En studie kring föräldrars moraliska föreställningar kring användandet av skärmar (ex mobiltelefon, television, iPads) i hemmet

Information till forskningspersoner

Vi vill fråga dig om du vill delta i ett forskningsprojekt. I det här dokumentet får du information om projektet och om vad det innebär att delta.

Vad är det för ett projekt och varför vill ni att jag ska delta?

Projektet behandlar frågor kring skärmteknik och medieanvändning i hemmet, med fokus på föräldrar. Projektet ämnar skapa ny kunskap kring just medieanvändning och föräldraskap. Du får den här informationen då du blivit rekommenderad av en bekant som informant (dvs person att intervjua för projektet).

Forskningshuvudman för projektet är Lunds universitet. Med forsknings-huvudman menas den organisation som är ansvarig för projektet. Ansökan är godkänd av Etikprövningsmyndigheten, diarienummer för prövningen hos Etikprövningsmyndigheten är 2023-03414-01.

Hur går projektet till?

Projektet baseras på intervjuer och jag vill för deltagande i projektet använda dessa intervjuer som underlag för de resultat studien kan komma att ge. Intervjuer i projektet görs med inspelning, och hur dessa inspelningar hanteras finns angivet i samtyckesblanketten som du/ni har fått i samband med detta dokument. Intervjun är planerad till mellan 1-2 timmar men kan vara kortare beroende på situation. Intervjun görs på plats hos dig som intervjuperson, specifik plats bestäms efter överenskommelse (exempelvis hemma i köket). I vissa fall kan intervju komma att göras på länk (exempelvis via Zoom).

Möjliga följder och risker med att delta i projektet

De risker som projektet kan medföra bedöms som ringa/inga. Det kan vara att intervjun kan skapa starka känslor och det är möjligt att avbryta intervjun närhelst du/ni vill.

Vad händer med mina uppgifter?

Projektet kommer att samla in och registrera information om dig. Information kommer samlas in i form av intervjuer och förvaras lösenordsskyddat/krypterat på

säker plats, utan tillgång till någon utanför projektet. Det kommer inte vara möjligt att härleda information tillbaka till dig/er, full anonymitet gäller.

Dina svar och dina resultat kommer att behandlas så att inte obehöriga kan ta del av dem. Ansvarig för dina personuppgifter är Lunds universitet. Enligt EU:s dataskyddsförordning har du rätt att kostnadsfritt få ta del av de uppgifter om dig som hanteras i projektet, och vid behov få eventuella fel rättade. Du kan också begära att uppgifter om dig raderas samt att behandlingen av dina personuppgifter begränsas. Rätten till radering och till begränsning av 1Forskningsprojekt: Skärmtid, föräldraskap och moral - En studie kring föräldrars moraliska föreställningar kring användandet av skärmar (ex mobiltelefon, television, iPads) i hemmet behandling av personuppgifter gäller dock inte när uppgifterna är nödvändiga för den aktuella forskningen. Om du vill ta del av uppgifterna ska du kontakta Magnus Johansson, 0708994836. Dataskyddsombud nås på dataskyddsombud@lu.se. Om du är missnöjd med hur dina personuppgifter behandlas har du rätt att ge in klagomål till Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten, som är tillsynsmyndighet.

Hur får jag information om resultatet av projektet?
Du kan alltid kontakta Magnus Johansson, se ovan för kontaktinformation, för att få information om projektets framskridande. Resultatet kommer presenteras i form av en avhandling och du som intervjuperson kommer kontaktas när denna finns tillgänglig.

Försäkring och ersättning
Ingen ersättning för intervjun utgår. Försäkring enligt Lunds universitets riktlinjer vid intervjuer gäller.

Deltagandet är helt frivilligt
Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan när som helst välja att avbryta deltagandet. Om du väljer att inte delta eller vill avbryta ditt deltagande behöver du inte uppge varför. Om du vill avbryta ditt deltagande ska du kontakta den ansvariga för projektet (se nedan).

Ansvariga för projektet
Ansvarig för projektet är Magnus Johansson, 800401-XXXX, magnus.johansson@kom.lu.se,

XXXXXXXXXX.

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Parenting in screen times

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how contemporary parenthood can be understood through parents' experiences and negotiations of 'screen time' in an increasingly media-saturated everyday life. While screen time in everyday language is used to connote activities on screen technologies, it has become a phenomenon which often describes a site of struggle, uncertainty and frustration in the domestic space. Parents are expected to manage and control screen activities in their family's everyday life, which often results in increased pressures and challenges in the routinized day-to-day. The dissertation is based on semi-structured interviews with a total of 35 parents. The arguments made in the dissertation illustrate how parents engage in moral negotiations around screen time, where they engage with the phenomenon in ways that are subjective (their own accumulated knowledge and experiences), intersubjective (relating to their children, other parents and the changing everyday contexts) and horizonal (negotiating state recommendations and public discourses). In accepting that media is now an integral part of daily life, parents engage in routinization work, attempting to assimilate screen time into their everyday amongst the ensemble of other mundane activities. This makes screen time attain special meaning, at times attempted to be 'naturalized' and less visible in daily life, other times it remains a site of struggle. In these explorations, ideals and norms relating to parenting in contemporary (Western) culture are uncovered. The meaning-making processes that the parents are involved in create ambivalent and paradoxical ideas around how screen time actually fits into their life-worlds.

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